THE Nation.
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CAPITALISM IS KILLING US
BERNIE SANDERS WITH JOHN NICHOLS

JANET MALCOLM'S LIFE WRITING
VIVIAN GORNICK

Making the Ocean Bleed Red

How the push for clean power is poisoning Indonesia's coastal waters.

BY NICOLAS NIARCHOS

VISIT…

NEW FROM SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

A TAKEDOWN OF THE STATUS QUO AND A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

"There is nothing more American than questioning the systems that have failed us and demanding the changes we need."

—**SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS,**
FROM THE INTRODUCTION

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Stripes: A rainbow zebra crossing in Bonn, Germany, in solidarity with the LGBT+ community.

FEATURES

14 Making the Ocean Bleed Red
NICOLAS NIARCHOS
How the push for clean power is poisoning Indonesia's coastal waters.

18 Capitalism Is Killing Us
BERNIE SANDERS WITH JOHN NICHOLS
American workers deserve better than our destructive economic system.

24 Broken by Design
HADAS THIER
State politicians are hijacking the ailing water system in Jackson, Miss.

4 EDITORIAL
The March of Folly

5 COMMENT
Empty Applause
The hollow ovation for Tyre Nichols's parents at SOTU.
ELIE MYSTAL

6 DISPATCHES
Our Lost Years
Bruce Springsteen's tour brings a return of community and ecstasy.
JOAN WALSH

11 THE ARGUMENT
Want to Fix Public Health? Stop Thinking Like a Doctor.
ERIC REINHART

12 THE SCORE
Finding Balance
MIKE KONCZAL

45 **Letters**

46 Q&A
Naomi Oreskes
CLAUDIA DREIFUS

COLUMNS

7 **Mic Drop**
On intersectionality and its discontents.
ADOLPH REED

8 **The Front Burner**
Grammy voters penalized Beyoncé for being too good.
KALI HOLLOWAY

13 **Deadline Poet**
Leadership, Kevin McCarthy–Style
CALVIN TRILLIN

B&A BOOKS & the ARTS

32 The Right Distance
Janet Malcolm's autobiographical turn.
VIVIAN GORNICK

36 The Unfulfilled Promise
Peniel Joseph's history of the three Reconstructions.
ROBERT GREENE II

40 A Profession!
What has become of literary studies?
NICHOLAS DAMES

Cover illustration: ADRIÀ FRUITÓS

"The unspoken tensions that had simmered in the past boiled over into outright hostility once Mississippi's capital turned Black." 〈24

ANDREAS RENTZ / GETTY IMAGES

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EDITORIAL BY *THE NATION*

The March of Folly

FEBRUARY 24 MARKS THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIA'S ILLEGAL AND BRUTAL invasion of Ukraine. While we salute the extraordinary courage and resistance of the Ukrainian people, the occasion is a sad one, marked by a continuing war, mounting lives lost, people maimed, cities and villages savaged, families displaced.

It should also be a time for sober reflection by the Biden administration, which had opportunities to avert the catastrophe but chose not to explore them.

US intelligence estimates show combined Russian and Ukrainian military casualties well in excess of 200,000—while the United Nations estimates at least 7,100 Ukrainian civilian deaths. The number of internally displaced people within Ukraine stands at roughly 6 million. An additional 8 million Ukrainian refugees have fled to other countries in Europe—the largest wave of refugees on the continent since the end of the Second World War.

The euphoria that greeted early Ukrainian successes in the field has contributed to a sense, in both Washington and Brussels, that outright military victory—and perhaps even regime change in Moscow—are realistic objectives.

Yet as we head into the second year of this war, the fighting seems poised to take an ominous turn: Russia is now fielding an invasion force nearly three times as large as the one it deployed on February 24, 2022: Between 300,000 and 500,000 troops are massed at the border with Ukraine. Thousands of reserves are also reported to be waiting to join the front in Belarus.

Reflecting on the US entry into World War I, George F. Kennan, perhaps the most prominent diplomat of his day, wrote: "It did not appear to us then that the greatest interest we had in the war was still that it should be brought to an end as soon as possible." America should avoid repeating that mistake.

To date, the Biden administration has held the line against direct involvement of US forces, sensibly fearing a war between two nuclear powers. But as the costs and the scope of our commitment rises, there will be a growing chorus arguing that the US cannot afford to lose. If the US had a role in the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines—as Seymour Hersh's recent report is the latest to suggest—then the Biden administration has already taken fateful steps down the road of replacing Ukraine as Russia's main military adversary. Last week it was revealed that the Pentagon wants to revive a top-secret program sending US commandos to Ukraine. We can only hope the prudent views of Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that Ukraine should now seek a political solution, are not ignored.

Yet so far, Biden has largely acquiesced to Kyiv's calls for more weaponry—and increasing US military entanglement. Most Americans would be surprised to learn that Ukrainian troops are already training at a US Army base in Oklahoma. They would be equally surprised to learn there are 50,000 combat-ready soldiers in Europe—including troops from the 101st Airborne Division stationed near the Ukrainian border in Romania. The enthusiasm in corporate boardrooms and Beltway greenrooms for an expansion of this war is not shared by the American public.

A diplomatic settlement will not be easy to achieve. Both sides will have to make concessions. Ukraine will need security guarantees, resources for rebuilding—and a future within Europe. But it will have to surrender hopes for regaining all the territory it has lost since 2014. Russia will need to relinquish much of the territory it claims to have annexed. Eventually, it will need relief from international sanctions.

To save Ukraine—and to avoid the risk of a truly catastrophic great power conflict—it is time to seek an end to the war.

Now is the moment to push for a cease-fire, to be followed by negotiations.

We must reject the siren song of those who would fight to the last Ukrainian. Given the suffering they have endured, Ukrainians may be understandably reluctant to accept a settlement. But the US and its NATO partners surely know that time is not on Ukraine's side. The Western unity so vital to Ukraine's defense is already beginning to fracture.

Russia—and Putin—has also paid a high price for its aggression. Ukraine has suffered terrible losses but gained national cohesion and confidence. To save Ukraine—and to avoid the risk of a truly catastrophic, possibly nuclear, great power conflict—it is time to seek an end to the war. For that to happen, the US and its allies must now lead the push for peace. N

COMMENT/ELIE MYSTAL

Empty Applause

Many of the congresspeople who clapped for Tyre Nichols's parents didn't do enough to prevent his death.

I'M SO SICK OF IT. I'M SO SICK OF THE POLITICAL platitudes offered by feckless politicians in the wake of the latest Black death at the hands of the police. I'm sick of the speeches. I'm sick of seeing the parents of the most recently lynched Black child trundled out at the State of the Union so politicians can disingenuously clap at their grief. What are they clapping for? Many of the people who rose at the joint session of Congress on February 7 to applaud for the parents of Tyre Nichols did either nothing or not enough to prevent his death. Many of them will continue doing nothing or not enough.

Actually, that's too generous: Saying that politicians "do nothing" lets at least half of these people off the hook. Republicans like Tim Scott actively frustrate attempts to stop the police from murdering Black people for sport. Others, like Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, have decided that Black children should be brutalized and killed to preserve the Senate filibuster and the donors and corporations that Senate gridlock supports. They shouldn't clap for parents whose children died as a result of the intractability of their political will. They should apologize.

They won't apologize, of course. They're not remotely sorry. Most of them have decided that Black people should continue to suffer and die at the hands of the police because the police are a more valuable political constituency than the people they murder. Most of them have decided that they are willing to sacrifice our blood to keep their seats. Most of them would sacrifice a thousand Tyre Nicholses for the endorsement of their local police union.

Some of them like it. Some of them like to watch us get beat up, like to watch us beg for our lives, and like to watch us inevitably die. Some of them think we deserve it. Some of them think it's the brutality and the threat of brutality that keeps us in line. And some of them know that most of their white voters like it too.

It's naive and foolish to think that police brutality is universally reviled. It's not. It never has been. Police brutality is a tool. Fear is a tool. State-sponsored terrorism is a tool. And those are tools that a bunch of our elected representatives are willing to use against Black folks.

I believe that in his heart, President Biden is not one of those people. I think, all else being equal, he would rather not have the police beat Black people to death on camera. That's more than I can say about the last guy to have his job.

But all else is not equal. And Biden has made the calculus, like most of his predecessors, that stopping agents of the state from killing, almost killing, or threatening to kill any Black person unlucky enough to be stopped by the wrong cop on the wrong day is a "stretch goal" that takes a backseat to bridges, unemployment rates, and bank fees.

The problem is not just Biden, however. Yes, he's willing to trade Black lives for cop support, and yes, that is incredibly frustrating, but honestly, the president of the United States is not vested with the power to fix "the police" in America. One of the maddening defects of the US Constitution is that it explicitly vests the power to organize the police not in the federal government, but in the states. The Constitution's authors were not thinking of police in their modern, standing-army form, but they well understood that Southern states wanted to run their slave patrols and slave catchers without interference from a centralized government. Whether they failed to anticipate the unchecked power of state-run paramilitary forces or correctly concluded that such forces would primarily be used to prop up white supremacy is, at this point, irrelevant.

The upshot of this constitutional failure is that policing cannot be fully reformed from Washington, D.C. There are things Congress could do but won't: ending qualified immunity, which protects the police from prosecution; banning brutal tactics like choke holds; ensuring that cops who kill are held federally accountable. But even those reforms would do little to stop the police from murdering Black people: Cops are resourceful in their uses of violence. The institution of policing must be rebuilt from the ground up. If voters (primarily white ones, who enjoy voting majorities in every state in the union) aren't willing to do that work in state after state after state, they accept that their police will disproportionately beat and kill Black people, forever.

I'm sick of the platitudes offered by feckless politicians in the wake of the latest Black death at the hands of police.

That's why replacing Biden with Kamala Harris or Pete Buttigieg or Gavin Newsom or whichever well-meaning Democrat you can think of wouldn't change very much. All you'd get is a slightly different version of the same message: "Sorry your son was murdered by cops, but not all cops murder, so we have to support the cops. Anyway, take a bow for being the victim of a problem our society has no intention of fixing."

Next year, there will be a different Black family invited to sit for an hour while politicians talk about unemployment rates and Social Security spending and all the things they really care about, before being asked to politely stand while the president praises all of the cops who didn't murder their family member. It is a theater that has become grotesque. N

DISPATCHES

TAMPA, FLA. / JOAN WALSH

Our Lost Years

Ecstasy and community return on Bruce Springsteen's 2023 tour.

"At 15 it's all tomorrows. At 73 it's a lot of goodbyes. That's why you have to make the most of right now."

—Bruce Springsteen, on opening night

I WAS 16 WHEN I FIRST HEARD BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, his 1975 masterpiece *Born to Run*. It was all tomorrows for sure. But I'm way closer to 73 than 15 now, and I know exactly what Springsteen was saying on opening night in Tampa. And I never felt it more than I did then. Having not played together since the onset of the pandemic, the E Street Band seemed changed. They looked new to one another—fresh, eye-blinking, head-shaking new. They'd been practicing in New Jersey, but they hadn't been together onstage in front of tens of thousands of roaring fans. And when they came out, for two hours and 41 minutes, that showed. I loved it. It felt like they did too.

Springsteen has been grieving his departed loved ones for years now, since the E Street Band's Danny Federici died in 2008 and Clarence Clemons died in 2011. On the 2012 "Wrecking Ball" tour, Springsteen performed tributes to both members almost every night. His most recent album with the E Street Band, *Letter to You*, which came out in late 2020, is full of death, but not Covid death—ordinary, past-70 death, the deaths we all signed up for. Still, titles like "Ghosts," "Last Man Standing," and "I'll See You in My Dreams" felt designed for their moment. *Letter to You* came out just before I lost my closest high school friend. Not to Covid; it was a stroke that was a long time coming. But it was during the pandemic, which meant a Zoom funeral and a lingering sense that his death wasn't real. We promised we'd grow old together. But I'm growing old with Bruce instead.

At one of the shows on the 2012 mourning tour, my sister—a fellow die-hard fan—and I made some friends. When Bruce did his tribute to Danny and Clarence, I lost it and cried with one of the people we'd just met. He and his wife and my sister and I became pals. He died what I would have to call a death of despair during the pandemic in 2021. An extrovert who regularly played guitar at senior homes, a live-music aficionado, a sports maniac, a raconteur—all of that gone. I missed him so much on opening night.

I found myself wondering how many other E Street fans have been lost over these past three years. And how many who didn't die directly from Covid would have been saved if they'd been able to go to what many Springsteen fans have called a religious experience. Or maybe they'd have been saved by some other band's convocation. Or a wedding. Or even by going to a funeral in person. We endured a genuine pandemic, and I despise the people who politicized the measures required to get us through it. But I also acknowledge that those limits were hard to endure, and some of us didn't make it.

The E Street Band has a three-tiered admission system. You can buy seats, or you can buy general admission tickets—and that's when things get interesting. *If* you win a lottery, then on the day of the show, you get a wristband that lets you stand right up front below the stage. It's called the Pit, which sounds like a level of hell but is actually heaven. My sister and I always try for the Pit. So in Tampa, that's where we were—we're the oldest, and we're proud.

The set list was conservative, as they often are on opening night. The band kicked off with "No Surrender," which threw me back to Springsteen's first official partisan act: campaigning for John Kerry in 2004 (his album *Magic* captures the despair of that loss). It was an eclectic set, and I always want more from Springsteen's first three albums; I'm that age. But the man has put out at least 21 studio albums, plus more than 25 live albums or official live-show releases—not to mention the infinite number of bootlegs some of us still listen to (if you're reading, Bruce, your version of Dylan's "I Want You" from the February 1975 Main Point concert would make my entire life). So pleasing everyone? Can't be done.

No surrender: Bruce Springsteen kicks off his long-awaited new tour at the Amalie Arena in Tampa.

OCTAVIO JONES / GETTY IMAGES

I don't know how long he and the band can keep doing this. Nothing is promised to us. I'm grateful I got what I did in Tampa: love, camaraderie, the E Street Band looking joyous and fierce, my sister and I still rocking the Pit, our friends out on the runway awaiting takeoff for future shows. "That's why you have to make the most of right now," Springsteen told us. Thanks, Bruce, for helping us out with that. N

Mic Drop

ADOLPH REED

Race and Class, Class and Race

On intersectionality and its discontents.

"Watch out there, Jack, there's people living under here."
—Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug"

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE RACE/CLASS DEBATE AS a live issue in the early 1970s, in the New Communist Movement debates that emerged out of Black Power and Students for a Democratic Society radicalism and the broader anti–Vietnam War movement. Those debates were influenced by a group of activists and writers who had been exploring a race-conscious—and at least suggestively anti-capitalist—radicalism, particularly in the magazines *Liberator* and *Freedomways*, and were modeled on understandings of anti-colonial national liberation struggles in what was then known as the Third World.

New Communism's mechanistic Marxism posited racism and class exploitation as distinct domains of inequality, dubbed "dual oppression." Taking account of gender stratification added a third pillar, hence the trifecta of "triple oppression." These constructs traveled beyond the increasingly sectarian ranks of the New Communists and spread broadly through left and movement circles.

However useful those notions might have seemed at the time, they didn't contribute much to our understanding of how racialist or gender ideologies and practices actually and concretely connect with capitalist class exploitation. Asserting, for example, that a Black single mother downsized out of her steelworker job and facing eviction or foreclosure suffers from "triple oppression" doesn't say anything about the sources of her circumstances—or how she might understand them, much less what she might do to improve them. The analysis instead was crafted in relation to an abstract debate, whose terms were remote from lived human experience. Instead of illuminating social relations as people actually lived them, they offered mere labels intended to fit the social world into procrustean taxonomies, derived from arbitrary ideological commitments.

During those years I lived and worked almost exclusively in Black middle- and lower-middle-class neighborhoods in overwhelmingly Black southwestern Atlanta, where I worked in three different capacities as a functionary in the administration of the city's first Black mayor, Maynard H. Jackson Jr. Anyone who paid attention to daily life—especially while living in the middle of, and in small ways participating in, the dynamics of racial transition in local politics—couldn't fail to notice the inadequacy of categories like dual or triple oppression. Experiencing the ways that Black Atlantans—both as individuals and as social strata—shaped their lives within capitalist class forces brought home vividly to me the folly of applying the generic race/class dichotomy to a fluid reality. It was impossible to miss the uneven distribution of expanding employment opportunities in the 1970s—or of the economic contraction associated with the energy crisis, deindustrialization, stagflation, and Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker's interest rate shock on an already economically stratified Black population. The steep differential between resources available for maintaining stability in tough times—to those, for example, with access to union or civil service protections (or to personal, class-based social networks and connections) and to those without such access—was also unmistakable.

Among the several youngish families who moved onto my own block within a year or two of one another—replacing the last white families—were a junior high school coach and an insurance company office worker, and a Vietnam veteran autoworker and a bank teller. As the local auto industry slowly spiraled downward, my neighbor's UAW-negotiated layoff protections ran out, and the family succumbed to financial precarity. Other households included a career military retiree and his spouse (who bought a Winnebago almost minutes before the energy crisis, which therefore never left their driveway), and an events photographer and social worker. My son's favorite Little League coach, who lived around the corner, was a municipal water inspector. Several of his friends' parents were also public employees; others worked in the evolving public-private social welfare economy, and some in private industry.

These families weren't a representative sample of Black Atlantans at the time, of course. Atlanta has been simultaneously a showcase for Black affluence and as poor and distressed as many other big cities. Then, as now, more than a quarter of Black Atlantans struggled to survive below or near the poverty line. But very many others, perhaps even a plurality, were like those I mention—people trying to take advantage of the expanded opportunity structures that had become available in our generation and to fashion their lives accordingly. Such people were most

Anyone who paid attention to daily life couldn't fail to notice the inadequacy of categories like dual or triple oppression.

immediately concerned with holding decent jobs, securing affordable housing—and the material security that enabled a respectable quality of life. For all of us, the embrace of racial solidarity was second nature. But only academics, freelance radicals, the emerging stratum of race-relations engineers, and some business owners traded in the shibboleths of Black nationalism and racial self-determination—the businessmen often in service to an explicitly reactionary politics: a red-, Black-, and green-tinted version of the anti-government, anti-welfare, self-reliance ideology of all small businessmen.

The punch line here is that focusing at the level of daily life—the conditions under which people actually reproduce their material existence and define and pursue their aspirations—upends the British Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall's apothegm, of which the adherents of "racial capitalism" and other both/and race-reductionist dodges today are so fond: that "race is the modality in which class is lived." Race is certainly a modality within which people experience life under American capitalism. However, class—as the expression of location within the political economy—is the framework in which race attains meaning. I'll have more to say about this in succeeding columns. **N**

Race may indeed be the modality in which class is lived. But class is the framework within which race attains meaning.

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Too Much Winning

According to the Grammy voters, it's possible to be too *good an artist to be recognized.*

AT THIS YEAR'S GRAMMY AWARDS, BEYONCÉ KNOWLES became the winner of the most Grammys ever, but lost the Album of the Year category to Harry Styles. It was the fourth time she lost that prize to a white artist. As widespread incredulity gave way to outrage, a *Variety* article that had been published a couple of days before the awards ceremony began resurfacing on Twitter.

> Under cover of anonymity, a handful of members of the Recording Academy, the professional association that bestows the awards, had spoken candidly about not just the *who*, but the *why*, of their Grammy votes. Beyoncé had been up for nine awards this year, including the coveted trinity: Album of the Year (for 2022's *Renaissance*), Record of the Year, and Song of the Year (both for the single "Break My Soul"). She would go on to win four, none of them in the aforementioned major categories. And while the opacity of an awards process can be maddening, it doesn't compare to learning that for some academy voters—according to *Variety*'s small, but nonetheless telling, sample—it's got nothing to do with music.

"I love Beyoncé's album," one voter told *Variety*, but she didn't choose the singer in "any of the top categories" because she has "already won a lot of Grammys." Another also admitted voting against Beyoncé because she "always win[s]." (Both said the same of Adele.) A third voter, described as an industry "veteran in his 70s," complained that "every time [Beyoncé] does something new, it's a big event and everyone's supposed to quake in their shoes—it's a little too portentous." That same speaker called himself a "bad voter" for not having listened to "a significant percentage" of the music in contention, blithely noting, "But that's my right."

This is not a piece arguing on behalf of Beyoncé's music, which would be pointless considering it was immaterial to how three out of the five interviewed judges voted. Instead, it seems more useful to look at the counterintuitive idea on repeat here, which seems to be that Beyoncé is in danger of becoming *too* decorated. That she is *too* meticulously intentional and inventive with every album rollout; *too* perfectionistic in ensuring that every release feels pull-out-the-stops unprecedented. That her cultural impact has been *too* outsize, *too* disruptive. In short, that she should be penalized for taking up *too* much rarefied space. Once again, it's misogynoir—the intertwined anti-Blackness and misogyny that pathologizes and stigmatizes Black women. Same refrain, different song.

This is bigger than the Grammys, obviously. Every time we get an unvarnished look-see at how the awards sausages get made, voters unwittingly confirm that racism and misogyny are key ingredients. In 2015, an anonymous Oscar voter declared her offense at the *Selma* cast wearing "I

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"My name is Catherine and for years, I struggled with my hair. Dull, brittle, falling out…it was just a complete train wreck. I didn't know what to do.

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–Catherine, California

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Can't Breathe" T-shirts to the film premiere in remembrance of police murder victim Eric Garner. Another anonymous Oscar voter in 2018 sniffed that *Get Out* "played the race card." I honestly cannot remember the last time (never) that an unnamed Academy Award voter complained about overblown marketing for the films of Steven Spielberg, or Meryl Streep's unwillingness to just read her lines.

But you know what I do remember? Judges in the International Gymnastics Federation admitting to repeatedly downgrading the scores of 32-time Olympic and world championship medal winner Simone Biles for executing unprecedented moves, in order "to ensure the safety of" athletes who would fail at trying the same. (This was more than two decades after the French figure skater Surya Bonaly was criticized by judges for landing backflips and intimidating her less able competitors.) I think of Serena Williams, the best tennis player of all time, being constantly masculinized in the press for her physique and how Maria Sharapova, who consistently lost to Williams despite using performance-enhancing drugs, made money off a book in which she expressed alarm over Williams's "thick arms and thick legs" and how "intimidating and strong" she was. I think of the accusations of being "too ambitious" that were hurled at then-shortlisted vice presidential contender Kamala Harris. Or the time when, even after 15 years at ABC as one of its most money-making showrunners, Shonda Rhimes tried to get her sister a $154 ticket to parent company Disney's theme park, only to be asked by an angry unnamed male executive, "Don't you have enough?"

Year after year, awards voters confirm that racism and misogyny are key ingredients in their picks.

It's not just high-visibility Black women who get this reaction. I also think of Jasmine Shepard, the first Black class valedictorian in her Mississippi high school, who was inexplicably made to share the honor with a white student whose GPA was beneath hers. Four years later, the school's class of 2021 valedictorian, Ikeria Washington, and that year's salutatorian, Layla Temple, were forced to share their titles with two outraged white classmates after their families complained that the school's handbook called for a different method for calculating GPA. In 2013, psychologist Kecia Thomas, now a dean at the University of Alabama, identified the "pet to threat" phenomenon, wherein women of color enter the workforce and are taken under the wing of a cheerleading mentor—usually a white man—only to have that support curdle into hostility once they prove their competency and look to advance. Relatedly, a 2018 study indicates that Black job seekers "are expected to negotiate less than their White counterparts" because their work is devalued. Because employers see them as less deserving, Black workers are punished with "lower salary outcomes" than equally qualified white candidates when they name a starting salary that exceeds the employers' expectations. "*Don't you have enough?*" indeed.

The hill I am currently gasping for air on isn't about an awards ceremony (which I haven't watched since I was a kid). It's my breathless fatigue at once again seeing a Black woman score the highest, only to have everyone call an unexplained time-out to rewrite the rules. Meanwhile, in 65 years, the Recording Academy has rewarded only 11 Black artists with Album of the Year, only three of whom were Black women. The last was Lauryn Hill, in 1999. Despite that history, the consistent demand remains: that Black women be just a little… less. **N**

OPPART/PETER KUPER

THE ARGUMENT

Want to Fix Public Health? Stop Thinking Like a Doctor.

ERIC REINHART

Following Anthony Fauci's retirement, President Biden will oversee a changing of the guard in US public health. In the process, he has a chance to rejuvenate a flailing system. But to do so, he must confront the fact that the rot in public health is structural: It cannot be cured by simply rotating the figureheads who preside over it.

A gradual medicalization of public health has eroded its foundations and turned it into a plaything of partisan politicking. Consider, for example, the history of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since 1953, every CDC director has had a doctor of medicine degree as their primary credential. Given that medical interventions constitute only 10 to 20 percent of modifiable factors affecting health, the CDC leadership's backgrounds reflect a consistent prioritization of narrow biomedical expertise at the expense of other fields representing 80 to 90 percent of pertinent knowledge for public health policy.

The physician and public health scholar Milton Roemer once observed that for the work of public health, "most of medical education is irrelevant." But irrelevant medical knowledge and relative ignorance of essential fields—such as labor history, social anthropology, and political economy—are not the most troubling implications of physician control over public health. Rather, it is the inability to recognize the limits and hazards of the clinical reasoning that medical training often imbues.

When we treat patients, doctors are appropriately focused on taking care of the individual in front of us. We typically cannot change their life circumstances, so we concentrate on helping them live as well as possible within existing constraints. Public health, by contrast, is about treating populations. Like medicine, it seeks to enable individuals to be free of health limitations that curtail their ability to live as they please. But public health pursues this by very different means. Its task is not to accommodate individuals to oppressive contexts, but to use the power of government to change conditions constraining people's freedom. The core tools of public health, then, are not just vaccines or lab tests, but also policies pertaining to corporate regulation, consumer safety standards, labor protections, public jobs and housing, decriminalization, and civil rights lawsuits.

Public health doesn't meet people where they are; it enables people to move more freely by altering their environment. It's not about individual risk tolerance, by which public responsibility is surreptitiously replaced with personal responsibility. It's about government making infrastructural investments—in things like clean air, water, and public spaces—to lower the level of risk to which individuals are exposed by living in society. To do this effectively, public health prioritizes those at greatest risk: the immunocompromised, the elderly, the incarcerated, and others especially exposed to harm. It does this not out of altruism, but because it recognizes that allowing harm to fall on vulnerable groups returns as multiplying harm for society at large. Public health requires seeing the world "from below," with our ears attuned to those suffering the most.

Covid-19 has shown that the dominance of top-down clinical reasoning that reduces "health" to individual patients while normalizing the existing social conditions—what I call "clinicism"—is stronger than ever in public health. This is because the individualistic paradigms of biomedicine are far friendlier to the economic philosophies of both major US political parties.

Since the 1980s, rather than being guided by the needs of the most disenfranchised, health officials have been taking orders from politicians who have embraced privatization, deregulation, and free markets. Not only does this exacerbate inequality, but it also erodes the material basis for trust in both government and one another, leading to the plague of public distrust now undermining vaccination campaigns and shared safety.

Health officials have been taking orders from politicians who embrace privatization and deregulation.

What we need instead is for federal health agencies to be free to tell lawmakers what to do by publicly presenting recommendations for executive and legislative action, and then holding lawmakers publicly accountable for the consequences of their decisions. To enable this, agency leadership can't be appointed by the president.

It's only a matter of time before far-right, anti-science agendas return to power. The Biden administration has a duty to protect the public by settling the notion that public health officials need to be insulated from partisan power. To issue sound policy recommendations and be trusted by the public, public health officials must be free to challenge politicians and oligarchs irrespective of party affiliation. N

Eric Reinhart is a political anthropologist, psychoanalyst, and physician.

The SCORE

Finding Balance

BRYCE COVERT + MIKE KONCZAL

Life is about tradeoffs. And that's also true for the Federal Reserve, which is meant to balance employment and inflation. Through 2021 and '22, many economists saw the scales as being off. While unemployment fell dramatically, inflation spiked far higher than most experts had predicted. We can see from the Fed's economic projections and public statements that these developments caught the institution off guard. Suddenly it shifted its focus to tamping down inflation, even if its decisions risked sparking a recession. And so last year the Fed scrambled to raise interest rates after having left them at zero throughout 2021.

But in recent months, there's been a turnaround: Inflation broke from its high levels, and the labor market is settling into a fantastic place. Inflation is still higher than where the Fed wants it, but it should no longer be the priority. The question is again one of tradeoffs, and I believe the Fed should prioritize full employment and be patient on inflation to preserve what workers have recently gained.

Consider where we were: From December 2021 through November 2022, the Consumer Price Index—a basket of goods that consumers buy frequently—was rising at a yearly rate of between 7 and 9.1 percent. Inflation was widespread; nearly 75 percent of items saw price increases of over 3 percent. The labor market, on the other hand, was booming; wage growth was higher than it had been since the early 1980s. Policy-makers worried that this growth rate couldn't be sustained without entrenching inflation.

But that has changed. In the final three months of 2022, core inflation—the price urban consumers pay for goods besides food and energy—fell by roughly a third. The normalization of supply chains is bringing down prices. Interest rate hikes have cooled off the housing market, which isn't yet reflected in the inflation numbers but will be soon. And price rises in the service sector, which is labor-intensive and thus sensitive to how tight the labor market is, are starting to slow after the initial economic reopening.

Inflation isn't at the 2 percent level the Fed wants, and there may still be bumpy months ahead. The prices of some goods, like used cars, may continue to go up; declining rents and real estate prices may take longer than anticipated to show up in the data; consumer spending may rebound with the declining costs of energy. But the medium-term trends suggest significantly lower inflation than last year.

Now think of the labor market we can preserve: The unemployment rate is down to 3.4 percent, the lowest since 1969 and among the lowest since we started keeping records in 1948. The unemployment gap between Black and white workers has been decreasing and is at a record low. Meanwhile, real wages, which began growing again in the second half of 2022, continue to rise at a rate of around 4 percent a year. That not only beats pre-Covid levels but rivals what we saw in the late 1990s. We haven't just returned to the labor market of 2019—we are doing better.

The Federal Reserve may still be willing to push the country into a recession to wring out that last bit of inflation. Right now it is predicting an economic contraction, with its forecasts showing unemployment increasing to 4.6 percent by the end of 2023. That would be around 2 million more people unemployed. But it isn't as simple as that. As researchers at Employ America have found, when unemployment goes up a little, it tends to keep going up. There are not a lot of tiny recessions in the history books.

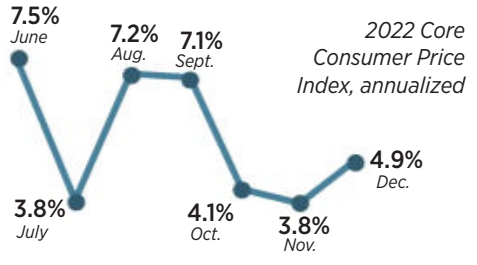
Meanwhile, there are things that could happen that would further moderate inflation. After so much labor reshuffling, workers are getting fully trained in their new jobs, which could increase productivity and innovation, thereby increasing economic growth and lowering inflation. Corporate profit margins are currently near record levels, but as the economy normalizes, those margins could be competed away, pushing down prices.

Given how much room there is for upside in the economy, it's worth taking tradeoffs seriously again. Living with inflation of a little over 2 percent for a short period would be worth it to keep the gains in the economy. If the Fed doesn't intervene, inflation could still pleasantly surprise us and drop to the desired level. But if the Fed hikes interest rates too high, the millions who lose their jobs won't care if inflation drops a percentage point.

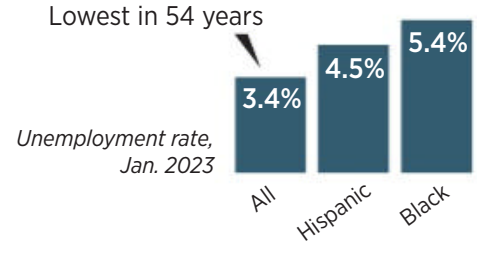
Mike Konczal

Economic Balancing Act

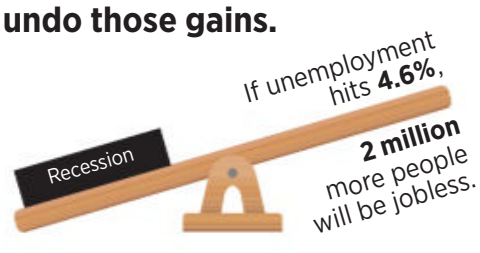
So far the Fed is getting inflation under control...



...without slowing the strong job market.



But too much pressure to reduce inflation could undo those gains.



Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics; Federal Reserve

INFOGRAPHIC: TRACY MATSUE LOEFFELHOLZ

SNAPSHOT/Valery Hache

Aux Barricades!

Protesters in Nice, France, demonstrate against pension reform on February 7. The country is bracing for a new wave of strikes and other mass actions in response to President Emmanuel Macron's deeply unpopular plan to hike the retirement age from 62 to 64 and increase the number of years that people must make contributions in order to receive a full pension.

By the Numbers

5
Number of years since a shooter killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Fla.

150
Number of K–12 school shootings in the US that have resulted in deaths or injuries since the Parkland massacre

112%
Increase in school shootings resulting in injuries or deaths between 2018 and 2022

40
Number of school shooting incidents so far in 2023

1
Number of new federal gun control laws enacted since 2007

19
Number of years since the 1994 assault weapons ban expired

1
Number of Gen-Z anti-gun-violence activists elected to Congress (Florida Representative Maxwell Frost, age 26)

CALVIN TRILLIN DeadlinePoet

Leadership, Kevin McCarthy–Style

He bowed to the wackos' demands.
He'd needed their votes. Those were vital
To winning the office he craved.
Now all he has left is the title.

FROM TOP: ALERY HACHE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; JIM MONE / AP

Making the Ocean Bleed Red

How the race for clean power is poisoning Indonesia's coastal waters.

THE Nation.

BY **NICOLAS NIARCHOS**

Ternate, Indonesia

THE VISITOR EMERGES FROM THE AIRPORT TERMINAL HERE INTO A WAFT of clove cigarette smoke. Cloves made this island famous. Until the late 18th century, Ternate and the surrounding Maluku archipelago—known by Europeans as the Spice Islands—were the only places in the world that the small aromatic flower grew. In the 15th century, whoever controlled the Spice Islands was bound to make a fortune selling spices at highly inflated prices in Europe, where nutmeg and cloves were all the rage. When Columbus set out on his journey west from Spain, he was searching for a quicker way to get *here*. When the Dutch colonized the Malukus, they acquired the islet of Run from the British in exchange for another one of their overseas properties: Manhattan.

Now outsiders are once again rushing to these islands to seek a fortune. This time, they are looking beneath the soil for rich seams of metals that are key components of the batteries that power electric vehicles: nickel and cobalt. As countries attempt to address climate change by phasing out gasoline-powered automobiles, these minerals have become the new cloves, traded in complex, globalized markets for higher and higher prices. According to the global metals consultancy Roskill, nickel demand for batteries could rise from about 6 percent in 2022 to more than 36 percent by 2030; over the same period of time, the demand for cobalt is set to double.

Last August, the Indonesian government announced that it had signed a $5 billion contract to sell nickel to Tesla. Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, a specialist information provider for the lithium-ion battery supply chain, projects that Indonesia could become the world's second-largest producer of cobalt by 2030, after the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Aris documented 11 different local fish species that had an "accumulation of heavy metals" destroying their organs.

In their scramble to extract these metals crucial to the transition from fossil fuels, however, mining companies have torn up the landscape where these minerals are found and, according to activists and scientists, have polluted the water around the Maluku Islands. They have built coal-fired plants to power their mining and refining operations and have forced out families who have worked the land for generations. From this vantage point, what is being touted as the latest "Green Revolution" looks more like a displacement of pollution from wealthy cities to poor rural communities.

WHEN I MET MUHAMMED ARIS ON A RECENT EVENING in a biker bar on Ternate's waterfront, he was wearing a blue polo shirt with "Save the Coral" emblazoned across the back. A burly man in his 40s with a penchant for slim cigarettes, Aris has been teaching aquaculture for 20 years at Khairun University. "I want to make sure that the ocean is clean for the long-term life of the marine ecosystem," he told me. Before our meeting, Aris had spent the day in his lab working on a project to plant seaweed near the village of Jailolo—"it's a technology transfer to the locals so they can have new ways of making a livelihood," he explained. His obsession with fish and other aquatic life has also propelled him onto the front lines of the rush for battery metals.

The topic of our conversation was the fate of Obi, another island in the Maluku archipelago. On Obi's southeastern coast and on the small adjacent island of Malamala, a huge nickel mining operation has stripped the hills of trees and gouged deep scars into the ocher earth. The sea—elsewhere in these islands a shimmering palette of turquoise, teal, and aquamarine—has turned a dull brown that residents call *kemerahan* ("reddish"). In a 2020 paper, Aris documented 11 different local species of fish that had an "accumulation of heavy metals" that was destroying their organs and that could cause health problems for humans who eat them.

Over the course of two weeks this winter visiting the Malukus and Southeast Sulawesi, another of Indonesia's nickel-rich provinces, I interviewed over 30 fishermen, farmers, teachers, miners, activists, and other residents of the scruffy seaside villages that abut some of Indonesia's largest nickel mining operations, as well as employees of and contractors for the companies. Many complained about how mining companies had grabbed land, forcibly displacing residents and providing them with inadequate reimbursements, and had polluted farms.

In the Malukus and in Sulawesi, most of the largest mines are majority-owned by Chinese groups, and the people I spoke with complained about the employment of Chinese nationals over Indonesians. Almost without exception, my interviewees told me that the mining operations had turned the sea *kemerahan* and that it had become nearly impossible to fish in the vicinity. "The fish don't come near here any more," said Lisman Musahati, a 27-year-old fisherman from Soligi, a village about four miles from the main mine site on Obi. "The waste from the mines is destroying the coral reefs, and we can't fish in this area anymore. We have to go farther out to catch anything—20 miles out and further in small boats."

In response to such charges, Anie Rahmi, the corporate communications manager of Harita, wrote in a letter to *The Nation* that Harita contributes to local prosperity, that more than 85 percent of its workforce is Indonesian, and that the company upholds strict environmental standards. "The presence of Harita Nickel has been contributing to the national and regional develop-

Nicolas Niarchos is a journalist whose work focuses on conflicts, minerals, and migration.

ILLUSTRATION BY **ADRIÀ FRUITÓS**

"The waste from the mines is destroying the coral reefs, and we can't fish in this area anymore."

—Lisman Musahati

ment since 2010," Rahmi wrote, "and economic growth in North Maluku Province has increased since the existence of the smelter industry."

In the centuries after Dutch colonization, the cultivation of cloves and nutmeg was introduced elsewhere—Mauritius, Zanzibar—and the Malukus became a sleepy backwater. A secessionist movement emerged in the wake of Indonesian independence in 1949, but it was quickly crushed, and the islands returned to somnambulance. It wasn't until Indonesia began issuing nickel mining permits in the 1990s that the Malukus' reawakening began.

In past decade, Indonesia's nickel industry has boomed and investments have poured in. One of the catalysts of this growth was the development in the early 2000s of a lithium-ion battery that uses NMC, a compound made of lithium, nickel, manganese, and cobalt, in its positive electrode, or cathode. (Pure lithium is avoided in batteries because of its tendency to catch fire.) NMC batteries allow electric vehicles to go farther and faster than previous technologies, and they are especially popular in the United States and Europe, where they have been adopted by companies like Audi, Ford, and Tesla. Indonesia, the world's largest producer of nickel, contributes more than a third of the global supply.

As demand for the batteries has risen, so has demand for the other metals that constitute them. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a boom in copper and cobalt mining has led to rampant corruption, with government officials being paid off by mining companies, and there have been allegations of child labor in some mines; in Chile, where lithium is extracted from salty underground lake water, Indigenous groups have accused lithium producers of pumping too much brine out of a delicate ecosystem.

Smoke on the water: A mining site looms over what were once prime fishing grounds.

And in almost every nation that is a major source of battery metals, Chinese companies have made strategic investments that now give Beijing an unprecedented level of control over the global supply chain. A large part of the reason for this is that Chinese policy-makers hope the adoption of electric vehicles will alleviate the pollution in that country's cities. Critics, however, have ascribed more sinister motives to Beijing's quest for superiority in the battery industry, likening it to an "arms race" and even suggesting that China could destroy the electric vehicle industry in other countries by cutting off the supply of critical metals. As the mining financier Robert Friedland put it at a commodity summit in 2018, "This disruption is coming to a theater near you, but you don't know about it, because you're not a member of the Chinese Communist Party. You're too far away from Beijing, where there's a command economy and this man who is president for life is absolutely on a jihad to convert the world to electric vehicles."

China and Indonesia already had bumpy relations in the decades after Indonesian independence, mostly because of Jakarta's rabidly anti-communist policies under Suharto (during the 1960s, for example, some 500,000 Communists were killed by the military and religious groups) and its persecution of the country's ethnic Chinese. After the Indonesia-China Strategic Partnership was signed in 2005, however, China began to dominate Indonesian industries, and China's Xi Jinping forged a close relationship with Joko Widodo, the current Indonesian premier. Chinese companies invested heavily in Indonesia's mining sector and built more coal power plants there than in any other country.

Shortly after the rapprochement between China and Indonesia, the Harita Group applied for a mining permit on Obi Island. Harita began in 1915 as a grocery store started by a Chinese immigrant to Indonesia. By the first decade of this century, the company had expanded into timber, palm oil, gold, and nickel mining, making its owner, Lim Hariyanta Wijaya Sarwono, a billionaire. In 2008, mining operations began at a site on Obi that would eventually come to resemble a miniature city. Four years later, Harita announced plans for an initial public offering for its nickel division in Singapore to raise $250 million, and a subsidiary advertised in the city's central business district with the slogan "Mum was wrong. Slow and steady doesn't win the race."

With their vivid green forests and bright blue water, the Maluku Islands make an indelible impression on anyone who visits. The hills of Obi are often swathed in fog and thundering clouds, and local legend holds that ghosts watch over the town from the woods. Endemic species of butterflies, flying foxes, and a "paradise crow" live among the trees, despite the encroachment of loggers in recent years. In the sea, far away from the mine, shallow coral reefs alive with colorful clownfish and Moorish idols stretch for miles.

The main town on Obi, Laiwui, a three-hour ride by motorized canoe from the mine site, is a laid-back place of cinder block bungalows that occasionally reverberate with music from passing vehicles. Few outsiders visit—getting here involves several flights and a 19-hour ferry trip. "Obi is a unique place," Abdul Kahfi, the 38-year-old chief of Laiwui, told me. "There are no Indigenous people here, [and] so many people

NICOLAS NIARCHOS

have come over the years from all over Indonesia—from Java, from Sulawesi—it looks like a miniature Indonesia."

The only people on the island who seem to be in a hurry are the employees of Harita, true to its advertising in Singapore. In 2015, only seven years after it broke ground on Obi, Harita announced that it was expanding its operations there, this time teaming up with subsidiaries of Xinxing Ductile Iron Pipes Co., a Chinese state-owned enterprise based in Hebei Province, to build a $320 million smelter to refine nickel ore. But this was peanuts compared with the new $1.05 billion smelter, fired by a huge coal power plant, that would come on line in 2021, this time financed by Harita and another Chinese company, Lygend Resources. Two Chinese electric vehicle battery manufacturers, GEM and Easpring, agreed to buy nickel and cobalt by-products from the new venture for eight years.

On a sunny day in May 2021, dressed in turquoise factory work wear and a red hard hat, Jiang Xinfang, the president of Lygend, gave a rousing speech at a ceremony celebrating the first batch of products from the new smelter. "We have every reason to believe," he said, "that this project will achieve the record of reaching production standards as soon as possible in the industry and create more miracles!" He lauded the "professional planning scheme" that envisioned for Obi—an island that is remote even by Indonesian standards—airports, supermarkets, and shopping malls, as well as a "new town with complete supporting facilities, livable environment, and humanistic characteristics."

But there was a darker side to what was happening on Obi. One of the problems was where to put the waste, or tailings, that resulted from the production of nickel. Two years before, according to the environmental reporting website Mongabay, Harita backed down from a plan to pump 6 million tons of waste into the deep sea in the face of protests. But damage was already being done. The Indonesian magazine *Tempo* reported in early 2022 that waste was being pumped out of a black pipe and that mountains of polluted soil were being washed into the sea. When I was there, the waste pipe had apparently been moved, but the sea around the mine site was still "reddish" with dirt, and fishermen complained that it was almost impossible to fish. "The thing I love most about Obi is the fish, but now, after the mining, the fishermen can't catch fish," Kahfi told me.

RABUL SAWAL / MONGABAY INDONESIA

It is perhaps hard to believe that such a remote and ostensibly wild a place as Obi belongs to anyone, but Harita and Lygend were not operating in a vacuum. Much of the land they were developing had been farmed by local people who came to the island long before the companies arrived there. When Harita's subsidiaries retroactively tried to compensate the former owners, they offered them a pittance. "The company grabs the land of the locals," said Kahfi's colleague Faldi Usman, who represents the people who live near the mine site. "We think it is wrong." ("No land previously or currently owned by local communities were utilized for its operations on Obi," Harita's spokesperson insisted.)

Now Harita is trying to gain control of even more territory to build more industrial facilities and the airport mentioned by Jiang in his speech. Watila (like many Indonesians, she goes by one name), a woman in her 60s who lives in Soligi, was offered only 12,000 rupiah—around 75 cents in US dollars—per square meter. She has lived off the income from her clove and coconut trees for the past four decades, but now the company wanted her land to build the airport. "They are pressuring me to sell my land," Watila told me, "but they are offering too little."

Wounded earth, bleeding seas: Off Obi Island, mine waste has given the water the stain locals call *kemerahan* ("reddish").

ARIS, THE PROFESSOR IN Ternate, began hearing from relatives in Obi about the damage being done to the environment shortly after the first mine site came on line. "My wife is originally from Obi," he told me. He said that he approached Harita in 2010 about doing an environmental study near the Obi mine site. After nine years, Harita finally allowed him to start testing the water in the area, although his access to a multitude of sites, including the main mine, was severely limited and in some cases prohibited.

"The thing I love most about Obi is the fish—but now, after the mining, the fishermen can't catch fish."

—Abdul Kahfi

Nevertheless, Aris was able to collect samples of water, fish, and fluted giant clams, and he prepared three academic studies presenting his findings. He wrote in one paper that

(continued on page 30)

American workers deserve a better deal than the unfettered capitalism that is destroying our health, our democracy, and our planet.

Capitalism Is Killing Us

BY BERNIE SANDERS
WITH JOHN NICHOLS

Bernie Sanders, as a newly elected US representative, poses in front of an image of labor leader Eugene Debs on November 25, 1990.

STEVE LISS / GETTY IMAGES

Eugene Victor Debs, the railroad workers' union leader who was the Socialist Party's great organizer and presidential candidate in the first decades of the 20th century, has been my hero since I was a young man, when I took to heart his message that "the very moment a workingman begins to do his own thinking he understands the paramount issue, parts company with the capitalist politician and falls in line with his own class on the political battlefield."

I was so impressed by Debs, his extraordinary life and work, that I created a short documentary about him in the 1970s, when I ran a small nonprofit media company. The video was sold to colleges and high schools. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings later released the soundtrack as a record. I was motivated to do the video because it was distressing to me how few Americans were familiar with Debs.

Debs was a trade unionist who played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for the rise of industrial trade unionism in America and the eventual development of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. He was a presidential candidate who received millions of votes and whose platform greatly influenced the New Deal, and a man of great courage who spoke out against US participation in World War I—which resulted in his being sent to prison for three years. While he has been dead for almost a hundred years, his life, work, and ideology remain enough of a threat to the corporate world that he has been virtually wiped out of our historical consciousness. There is an important lesson to be learned from that erasure.

Debs was a fervent believer in grassroots democracy and was opposed to authoritarianism and the cult of personality. "I would not be a Moses to lead you into the Promised Land, because if I could lead you into it, someone else could lead you out of it," he said. I share his view. Real change comes only from the bottom up, when thousands, then hundreds of thousands, and then millions stand together and demand a better deal. Never from the top down. Elected officials should stand in solidarity with workers and do everything they can to empower them. Not "lead" them.

That's my mission. I embrace it with relish.

I have never been neutral when it comes to workers' rights. No real change can take place in this country unless working people are prepared to fight for their rights. Part of my job, as a mayor, a member of Congress, a senator, and a presidential candidate, has always been to stand with workers who are fighting for economic justice. I don't cross picket lines; I join them. It is a privilege to march with workers who have the courage to take on the powerful special interests that dominate the economic and political life of the country.

But my responsibility doesn't end there. As a presidential candidate and, more recently, as the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, I've supported the struggles of working Americans in tough times and fought to give them a greater say in controlling their destiny. And frankly, I am frustrated by politicians who talk a good line about workers' rights on the campaign trail but then fail to deliver when they acquire power.

That's bad policy, and bad politics. Democrats made an enormous and far-reaching mistake in the 1990s when President Bill Clinton aligned with Wall Street to approve the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other trade deals. Workers felt betrayed, and it cost the party dearly in the disastrous midterm elections of 1994, when control of the House and Senate shifted to extremist Republicans, who cynically exploited the opening Clinton had given them. Workers understood that you couldn't be both pro–Wall Street and pro-worker. For many working-class Americans, Clinton's choice to side with Wall Street was the end of their allegiance to the Democratic Party, a trend that has only grown over the years.

No real change can take place unless working people are prepared to fight for their rights.

Democrats should have learned their lesson. But there is very little evidence that they did. Too many of them still do not understand that the policies of a party that is supposed to stand for workers must actually do so when it's in power.

More than any other occurrence in modern American history, the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the ugliness of modern American über-capitalism. While billionaires and CEOs sat safely at home, on their yachts, or in their private planes and corporate profits soared, millions of working-class Americans had no choice but to go to work in hospitals, schools, grocery stores, warehouses, and meatpacking plants. Millions of these essential workers got sick. Tens of thousands of them died unnecessarily. We were reminded that, like the kings and queens of past eras, the very rich know nothing about how most people live, could not care less about real people, and firmly believe they have a divine right to rule.

While the pandemic exacerbated the economic crises facing working families, the chaos we saw in 2020 only crystallized what ordinary Americans had experienced for decades. You won't hear this discussed on CBS or read about it in the pages of *The New York Times*, but one of the biggest stories of our time is how, over the course of the past 50 years, this country has witnessed a massive transfer of wealth from low- and moderate-income families to the very rich. Income and wealth inequality is at its highest point since the Great Depression.

I can tell you as a United States senator that the issue of inequality rarely, if ever, gets sufficient attention on the floors of Congress. While we are very good at renaming post offices and acknowledging Super Bowl winners, we don't often get around to discussing the reality that, after adjusting for inflation, the average worker in America is making roughly $43 a week less today than she made 50 years ago. Think about that. Think about the huge increases in worker productivity that we have seen in the past five decades. Think about the fact that, in 1981, when I became the mayor of Burlington, Vt., the largest city in my state, we didn't have one computer in City Hall. We didn't have cell phones. We didn't have e-mail. We didn't have printers. The same reality existed, for all intents and purposes, in every workplace in America.

Bernie Sanders, in 2020, proposed a federal jobs guarantee that would have established that every American has the right to a job.

With more efficient machinery, the development of the Internet and digital communications, automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence, the American economy has become dramatically more productive, and the average American worker produces more than ever before.

I can tell you as a US senator that the issue of inequality rarely, if ever, gets sufficient attention on the floors of Congress.

From the end of World War II until the late 1970s, according to the Economic Policy Institute, increased productivity and increased pay for workers ran roughly parallel. Since then, the measures have parted ways. Between 1979 and 2020, worker net productivity increased by 61.8 percent, while worker hourly pay increased by just 17.5 percent. What happened? "Starting in the late 1970s, policymakers began dismantling all the policy bulwarks helping to ensure that typical workers' wages grew with productivity," explain the analysts at the EPI. "Excess unemployment was tolerated to keep any chance of inflation in check. Raises in the federal minimum wage became smaller and rarer. Labor law failed to keep pace with growing employer hostility toward unions. Tax rates on top incomes were lowered. And anti-worker deregulatory pushes—from the deregulation of the trucking and airline industries to the retreat of anti-trust policy to the dismantling of financial regulations and more—succeeded again and again." Instead of increased productivity translating into increased pay and shorter workweeks, Wall Street investors made off with the cash in one of the biggest heists in the history of the American economy.

That heist transformed the lives of the very rich, allowing them to pursue their wildest dreams—even if those dreams involved building rockets and flying into space. But for the working families that were left on Earth, horizons narrowed. They had to work harder for less. They lived on the margins, struggling to get by. When inflation was surging in 2021 and 2022, many found they could no longer make it. A survey of 500 parents by the nonprofit advocacy group ParentsTogether Action found that about 41 percent said they've had to get a new job or work more hours to make ends meet. About 48 percent said they could no longer afford enough food for their family. And almost half of parents who report they are struggling to afford food now that the government has discontinued the expanded monthly Child Tax Credit payments say they have skipped meals so their children have enough to eat.

Is it any surprise that, around the same time that the ParentsTogether Action survey came out, a June 2022 survey of over 1,000 Americans from the Decision Lab found that a whopping 77 percent of respondents reported anxiety about their financial situation? For many families, there's a sense that—no matter how hard they work—they'll never catch up.

When I was growing up in the 1940s and '50s, most American families had one breadwinner, who was able to earn enough money to pay the bills. We certainly weren't rich in my family. But my father, who immigrated to this country at 17—and who, as a young man, did not speak a word of English—eventually found work as a paint salesman. He never made much money. My mother stayed at home and cared for my brother, Larry, and myself. There were plenty

KENA BETANCUR / GETTY IMAGES

of times when they struggled to keep things together in our three-and-a-half-room rent-controlled apartment, No. 2C, at 1525 East 26th Street in Brooklyn. There were always arguments about money. There were hand-me-down clothes. There were tattered sneakers and baseball gloves. And my mother, who died at 46, never achieved her dream of owning her own home. Yet we were never without shelter, never without food, never without the basics of life.

Today, the notion that a family of four could get by in New York City on the earnings of a not particularly well-paid paint salesman is unimaginable.

Unfettered capitalism will never accomplish the goal of bringing dignity to work. The American economic system, with its excessive corporate greed and concentration of ownership and power, destroys anything that gets in its way in the pursuit of profits. It destroys the environment. It destroys our health. It destroys our democracy. It discards human beings without a second thought. It will never provide workers with the fulfillment that Americans have a right to expect from their careers. Instinctually, we know this. But we don't talk about it in these terms—the terms that can frame out an argument for something different. Something better.

To get that something better, people have to confront the system itself.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew that. That's why, in his 1944 State of the Union address, he made the case for establishing and recognizing economic rights. Unfortunately, because it was delivered in the midst of World War II, FDR's argument never got the attention it deserved. But the point he sought to make then is every bit as relevant today. In his address Roosevelt said, "We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence."

Americans are proud that our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, a free press, and other rights. We understand that we can never have political freedom unless we are free from authoritarian tyranny.

But, as Roosevelt explained almost 80 years ago, if we are serious about creating a truly free society, we must take the next step forward and guarantee every man, woman, and child in our country basic economic rights: the right to quality health care, the right to a good education, the right to decent and affordable housing, the right to a secure retirement.

And the right to a secure, well-paying, and meaningful job.

To achieve the genuine freedom to which we are entitled as human beings, we cannot be satisfied with political democracy alone—especially at a time when democracy itself is under fierce attack. We need economic democracy every bit as much as we need political democracy.

The time is long overdue to address the rampant greed that is being caused by the unfettered capitalism we now experience.

The only way to get it is by breaking the shackles of the old thinking that says there is no alternative to unfettered capitalism. We've got to upend the lie we've been told for decades, the one that says: *This is how the system works. This is how globalization works. This is how capitalism works. This is how employers and employees will always relate to each other.*

There's nothing you can do about it.

So just shut up and get back to work.

The time is long overdue to address the rampant greed, inequality, and destructiveness that is being caused by the unfettered capitalism we now experience. We need an economic system that serves humanity rather than exploits it. There can be honest debates about how best to achieve that end, but in my view, there are at least four steps that must be taken:

1. Create a full-employment economy in which every worker is entitled to a decent job.

2. Strengthen the trade union movement, empower workers, and make unions a genuine counterbalance to corporate power.

3. Remove the barriers to worker ownership and increase the presence of workers on the boards of corporations that are privately owned.

4. Address the reality that technological change is rapidly transforming work in the 21st century, just as a combination of technological progress and free-trade policies did in the 20th century. It is imperative that we make certain these sweeping changes to the workforce benefit ordinary Americans, and not just the 1 percent who own the technology.

During my 2020 presidential campaign, I proposed a federal jobs guarantee that would establish, once and for all, that every American has the right to a job. For me, this rejection of austerity economics wasn't just a line in a speech or a casual embrace of populism. It became a major focus of my campaign, because I believe that a federal job guarantee will be transformational for our society. Let's be clear: This concept is about much more than just providing work and an income for people who are unemployed, as important as that is. A job guarantee will help us rebuild our country, go a long way toward ending economic insecurity, improve mental health, and create a stronger sense of community. It will create a much healthier and happier America.

How would a federal job guarantee work? It's not hard to figure out where to begin. We need more doctors, nurses, dentists, home health care workers, nursing home attendants, social workers, and other medical personnel—a number that will have to radically increase after we move to a national health program and all Americans can access the health care they need.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, essential workers had no choice but to go to work while billionaires sat safely at home.

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The decline of unions has cost American workers dearly, especially the young and people of color.

Franklin Roosevelt understood the need for economic rights in order to build a truly free society.

Adapted from the book It's OK to Be Angry About Capitalism, *by Senator Bernie Sanders, with John Nichols. Copyright © 2023 by Bernie Sanders. Published by Crown, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.*

We need more child care workers and teachers, a number that will also increase as we improve the quality of public education in this country, expand educational opportunities, and address our crisis in mental health. And, as the nation ages, we will need millions of additional workers to provide supportive services for seniors to help them age comfortably in their homes and communities, which is where they want to be.

We will require millions of new construction workers as we build large numbers of desperately needed units of affordable housing and as we rebuild our crumbling infrastructure—roads, bridges, water systems, wastewater plants, and public transportation. We will also greatly increase the number of our manufacturing jobs in order to supply all of the products that new housing and infrastructure require.

And, oh yes, there is the slight matter of saving our country and the planet from the devastating effects of climate change and the catastrophic damage that will occur if we do not rapidly move away from fossil fuels. If we are serious about moving to efficient and sustainable energy and substantially lowering our carbon emissions, we will need millions of workers to help us make that historic and essential energy transition.

We can meet all those needs—and those that arise in the future—if we create a job guarantee that is sufficiently visionary, and sufficiently funded. "The goal is to eliminate working poverty and involuntary unemployment altogether," explains Darrick Hamilton, an economist at the New School, who has advised me on these issues for a number of years. "This is an opportunity for something transformative, beyond the tinkering we've been doing for the last 40 years."

Will a job guarantee cost money? Of course. But failing to invest in our future costs us even more.

FOR MUCH OF THE 20TH CENTURY, there was a shared understanding of the role unions needed to play, not just in improving the circumstances of workers but in providing a counterbalance to powerful business interests. Democrats like Franklin Roosevelt got it. A North Carolina mill worker famously said, "Mr. Roosevelt is the only man we ever had in the White House who would understand that my boss is a son-of-a-bitch." During FDR's presidency, the share of private-sector workers who were union members rose from 15 percent to 34 percent. The growth of organized labor continued into the 1950s, when a Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower, said, "Today in America unions have a secure place in our industrial life. Only a handful of unreconstructed reactionaries harbor the ugly thought of breaking unions. Only a fool would try to deprive working men and women of the right to join the union of their choice."

Support for unions was not really a debatable point. Strong unions were associated with a strong America.

Tragically, those days ended around the time that Ronald Reagan fired the striking air-traffic controllers in 1981.

In the last several decades, unions have been attacked and beaten down so aggressively—and in many cases illegally—that today less than 11 percent of Americans are union members. And as of 2022, that figure is 6 percent in the private sector.

This did not happen by accident. The corporate world—the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Business Roundtable, and other powerful business groups—knew exactly what they were doing. They fully understood that strong unions can put a check on the kinds of greed, exploitation, and unilateral decision-making that exist in nonunion companies. These corporate titans knew that a good union contract means that a larger share of corporate profits goes to the needs of workers, not just to high dividends for wealthy stockholders, stock buybacks, and outrageous CEO compensation. That's exactly what they did not want to see, and they acted accordingly.

According to data compiled by economic research groups:

§ Between 1999 and 2003, as an example, 75 percent of private-sector union elections saw an employer hire outside consultants to run an anti-union campaign during the election; in 89 percent of union elections, employers forced employees to attend captive audience meetings to hear anti-union propaganda; and in 54 percent of private-sector union elections, employers threatened workers during mandatory one-on-one meetings.

§ Data collected between 1995 and 2007 indicates that an employee who engages in a union organizing campaign has a one-in-five chance of getting fired.

§ A study of union campaigns in Chicago in 2002 found that nearly 50 percent of employers threatened to close or relocate their business if workers elected to form a union.

§ Even when workers can overcome these enormous obstacles and win union elections, more than half of workers who vote to form a union don't have a union contract a year later, and 37 percent still do not have a first contract two years after the election, due to loopholes in the labor laws, according to a study published in 2009.

By 2022, the United States had lower levels of unionization than at any time since FDR was imagining the New Deal project in 1932. The 58 unions that make up the AFL-CIO now have only 12.5 million members.

The decline of unions has cost American workers dearly, especially the young and people of color. So many Americans are hurting,

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

but they don't have the tools to fight back.

The irony of our moment is that even though unions are at just about the weakest point in my lifetime, public opinion polls show that they are more popular than at any time in decades. A Gallup survey done in August 2022 found that 71 percent of Americans approved of unions. That was the greatest level of support since 1965, and it was higher than at some points during FDR's presidency. At a time when the middle class continues to shrink and more than 60 percent of our people live paycheck to paycheck, the average American knows that if we're going to rebuild the middle class, we need to rebuild the union movement.

SCOTT HEINS / GETTY IMAGES

Union membership has declined in recent decades, but in 2022, support for unions reached its highest level since 1965.

When that connection becomes clear, the necessary course of action also becomes clear. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. We just have to remember what FDR did during the Great Depression, when he and Democrats such as New York Senator Robert Wagner succeeded in passing legislation that struck down many of the most egregious barriers to union organizing. In 1932, the year Roosevelt was elected, union membership was around 2.9 million. By the time his presidency ended, it was over 13 million and rising.

FDR's efforts to put government on the side of working people were effective: Production increased, and so did prosperity. It can work again.

During the 2020 campaign, I developed a plan for strengthening unions and increasing union membership. I stated, "There are many reasons for the growing inequality in our economy, but one of the most significant reasons for the disappearing middle class is that the rights of workers to join together and bargain for better wages, benefits, and working conditions have been severely undermined."

To address this reality, I proposed to:

§ Double union membership in four years by allowing the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to certify a union if it receives the consent of a majority of eligible workers; repeal restrictive sections of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act; and prevent corporations from gaming the rules by classifying employees as independent contractors.

§ Establish federal protections against the firing of workers for any reason other than "just cause," a change that would make it more difficult to intimidate workers who are engaged in organizing unions and negotiating contracts.

§ Enact "first contract" provisions to ensure that companies must negotiate a first union contract within a reasonable period of time.

§ Deny federal contracts to companies that pay poverty wages, outsource jobs overseas, engage in union-busting, deny good benefits, and pay CEOs outrageous compensation packages.

§ Eliminate right-to-work (for less) laws and guarantee the right to unionize for workers historically excluded from labor protections, including farmworkers and domestic workers.

I understand that it may be hard for many Americans to imagine a future where employees are no longer at the mercy of their bosses. Workers and their unions have been so frequently attacked, beaten down, and dismissed that the task of securing a fair shake for the working class seems overwhelming. I don't see it that way. I believe that working-class Americans are more engaged, more energized, and more prepared to pursue economic justice than at any point in my lifetime.

That pursuit will be challenging, but I am convinced the future for the working class holds all the possibility that Eugene Victor Debs foresaw. "Ten thousand times has the labor movement stumbled and fallen and bruised itself, and risen again; been seized by the throat and choked and clubbed into insensibility; enjoined by courts, assaulted by thugs, charged by the militia, shot down by regulars, traduced by the press, frowned upon by public opinion, deceived by politicians, threatened by priests, repudiated by renegades, preyed upon by grafters, infested by spies, deserted by cowards, betrayed by traitors, bled by leeches, and sold out by leaders," he wrote at the dawn of the 20th century. "But notwithstanding all this, and all these, it is today the most vital and potential power this planet has ever known, and its historic mission of emancipating the workers of the world from the thralldom of the ages is as certain of ultimate realization as is the setting of the sun." N

I am convinced the future for the working class holds all the possibility that Eugene Victor Debs foresaw.

Broken by Design

Declining federal funding has left the water system in Jackson, Miss., at the mercy of conservative state politicians.

BY HADAS THIER

Every March, cardinals arrive in Kali Akuno's front yard in Jackson, Miss., to build nests in his trees. But in spring 2017, something odd happened: The chicks hatched on cue but then died. "They didn't fall out of the nest," Akuno says. "They starved."

Evolution had synced up life cycles so that "the birds nest when they know there's going to be an abundance of insects to catch and feed to their chicks," Akuno explains. But that spring, there were no bugs. About two weeks later, the insects emerged in swarms from their winter freeze with few natural predators to thin their numbers. "They're just not on cycle anymore," Akuno says.

In Jackson, climate change has disrupted more than the lives of birds. Increased flooding has overwhelmed the water treatment plants, and cold weather has damaged the city's disinfecting equipment and burst its aging pipes. "Over the last five years," Akuno says, "almost each winter we've been getting record-breaking freezes. Our system is just not built for that. Almost nothing in Mississippi is built for that. And it's wreaking havoc on the systems down here in Jackson."

The water infrastructure in Jackson—a city that is 83 percent Black—has been underfunded and crumbling for decades. Now the intensifying impacts of a changing climate are delivering a final blow. Whether in New Orleans in 2005, Flint, Mich., in 2014, or Jackson today, Black Americans are disproportionately affected by these system failures. Abre' Conner, the NAACP's director of environmental and climate justice, testified during a congressional hearing on water infrastructure in September: "The effect of climate change on Black people has finally come into national focus, because Black people experience the most horrific impacts from historic disinvestment in communities."

The disproportionate effects of climate change and national disinvestment highlight an important point: While the water infrastructure may be deteriorating in cities across the country, not all cities fare the same. Jackson suffers more because it has been left to the mercy of conservative leadership in the state of Mississippi.

"Black people experience the most horrific impacts from historic disinvestment."

—Abre' Conner,
NAACP director of environmental and climate justice

The Last Straw

When a record-setting rainfall hit Jackson in August of last year, the Pearl River spilled into the Ross Barnett Reservoir. The river and the reservoir are the city's main water sources, and they feed into its two water treatment plants. The overflow swamped the equipment at the O.B. Curtis plant, and its pumps failed. As a result, the system could not maintain the water pressure flowing into water tanks and households. For a week, more than 150,000 residents were left without water to drink, wash dishes, flush toilets, or cook or shower with. Schools, stores, and restaurants closed.

The breakdown of the water system was not a surprise. The O.B. Curtis plant was already operating on backup pumps, and its disinfecting equipment was degraded after years of neglect. In the weeks before the August rains, the city had been under a boil-water notice due to high levels of turbidity—a measure of the number of particles found in the water. These particles aren't necessarily unsafe themselves, but they provide shelter for microbes and reduce the effectiveness of disinfectants. Left unaddressed, high turbidity can lead to outbreaks of waterborne diseases. When the water was restored on September 5, the boil-water notice was still in effect, and it would continue for another 10 days.

For Jacksonians, this breakdown brought a feeling of déjà vu. Rewind just a year and a half: A cold snap in 2021 incapacitated the city's water system, leaving tens of thousands of residents without running water for several weeks. Critical equipment in the O.B. Curtis plant froze, and more than 100 water mains broke. Jackson's outdated water distribution system is particularly fragile because it includes pipes that are smaller than the industry standard and some that are made of concrete or cast iron, which easily crack. Charles Williams, the director of the Public Works Department at the time, presciently told Jackson's *Clarion-Ledger* in 2021: "We are by no means out of the woods yet. This particular event really shows how vulnerable the system is. But it could be another scenario next time."

The system has been in crisis mode for years. Storms in 2010, 2014, and 2018 led to water outages. And at the end of 2022, a winter freeze beginning on Christmas Eve plunged the city into another water emergency. Faucets ran dry, boil-water notices were issued, and schools closed yet again.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the city has issued approximately 300 boil-water notices over the past two years and suffered more than 7,300 water line breaks in the past four. Numerous consent decrees, violation notices, and orders from the agency dot the city's public record. Among them is a 2015 EPA finding of lead in the city's water samples—in some places almost double the allowable levels. Since that year, contamination levels have gone down. But two-thirds of water samples still contain lead. No amount of lead is safe for children, according to the CDC.

Inside the O.B. Curtis treatment facility, much of the equipment that monitors and treats the water has long been in disrepair. A 2020 EPA investigation, for instance, found that pH meters, turbidimeters, and other equipment hadn't been repaired or calibrated in about three years—since the last time its instrument technician position was filled. In fact, staffing shortages at the city's water plants meant that employees were working hundreds of hours of overtime before the recent crisis.

Hadas Thier is the author of A People's Guide to Capitalism: An Introduction to Marxist Economics.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **URI THIER**

Bottled up: A volunteer with the Immigrant Alliance for Justice and Equity distributes free water to Jackson residents in September 2022.

The dysfunctional system leaves Jackson's water supply vulnerable to E. coli and other contaminants. Broken pipes decrease water pressure and flow, which allows contaminants to enter through the cracks. Water that isn't properly treated also becomes corrosive, causing lead from old pipes to leach into the supply. And boiling water—a near constant exercise in Jackson—increases lead concentration. According to the EPA's 2020 investigation, the conditions of Jackson's water system are an "imminent and substantial endangerment" to the health of its residents.

Tracy Williams, a mother of three, described what Jackson's water woes have meant for families: "I have a 16-year-old son, a 13-year-old son, and an 8-year-old daughter. For years, when we've made their bottles, their lunch, breakfast, we've turned on the faucet for water. How much lead have I put in my children within those years? Each one of my children has eczema. Have I been bathing my children in lead-based water? Have I been putting bacteria in my children from this water?"

Makeeba Parker, who lives in West Jackson, has four children. She's had to teach them to brush their teeth with bottled water. When she cooks, she cleans her meat with bottled water too. "Girl, I've been living here for 15 years," she says. "I have heard boil-water notices for the 15 years I've been here. A lot of people adapted to buying bottled water and using it every day, whether the boil-water notice is on or not. We know the danger."

"Have I been bathing my children in lead-based water? Have I been putting bacteria in my children?"

—Tracy Williams, mother of three

To make matters worse, the water billing system in Jackson has been defective for years. In 2010, the city agreed to pay Siemens Industry $90 million to fix everything from pipes to meters. The company had promised to save the city at least $120 million but ultimately left its billing system in shambles. These days, some Jacksonians don't get water bills at all, while others get bills that are extraordinarily high. Parker recently received a bill for almost $8,000. She has tried repeatedly to contact the city's water department about the overcharge as well as a months-long water main leak in her yard. "You can't even get them on the phone," she says.

Maati Primm owns a small bookstore that's been in her family for 83 years. Marshall's Bookstore has been on Farish Street since the days of Jim Crow, when the district was an economic and cultural sanctuary for Jackson's Black community. "Boil-water notice after boil-water notice after boil-water notice," she says. "After a while you think, 'I probably shouldn't *ever* drink this water.' There is a level here of normalcy for oppression, so we limp on."

The State Hates Its Capital

When I went to pay the meter for a parking spot in downtown Jackson in September, a woman walking by said, "Oh, those don't work." I was clearly from out of town.

The state of disrepair is so much a part of daily life that residents trade memes about broken roads, and the local comedian Rita Brent wrote a popular song, "Can You Rock Me Like a Pothole?," about trying to find a man who will "wax my axle" as much as the uneven streets of Jackson require.

Jackson's roads share at least one foe with the city's water distribution system: the underground geology. The Yazoo clay under Jackson's topsoil expands and contracts with the temperature, putting pressure on roads and pipes. Yet beyond this bit of geological misfortune, none of the other infrastructure problems are the result of luck. The real problem, I was told over and over again, is state politics. "The first thing you have to understand," says Pieter Teeuwissen, Jackson's city attorney from 2009 to 2013, "is that the state of Mississippi hates its capital city."

As Teeuwissen explains it, this partly has to do with a longstanding rural-versus-urban divide. The state's largest city has produced only two governors in Mississippi's history. State Senator John Horhn similarly cites "a historical love-hate relationship between the Legislature and the capital city since its inception."

Horhn tells me, "We initially had a rural planter elite that ran the state, because they had the money and plantations, and then that leadership migrated to rural northeastern Mississippi. Now most of our legislative leadership comes from small towns."

But the unspoken tensions that only simmered in the past boiled over into outright hostility and sabotage once Mississippi's capital turned Black—first in its demographics and

then in its political leadership. When the federal government forced Mississippi to desegregate its schools in 1970 (a full 16 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*), it triggered a "particularly hurried" white flight, in Akuno's words, in which thousands of white families moved out of the city. Between 1990 and 2020, the city lost roughly 40,000 residents, and its population shifted to majority Black.

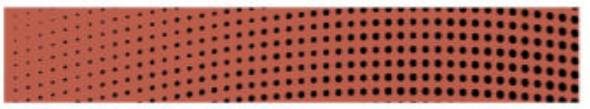
This demographic change, Horhn says, "prompted migration, a deliberate disinvestment by the business community of the capital city, and a disinvestment by the Legislature that keeps peeling off more resources and agencies and programs to locate them outside of the capital city."

Jackson elected its first Black city council member in 1985 and its first Black mayor, Harvey Johnson, in 1997. Since Johnson, all of the city's mayors have been Black. Today, if you walk up the steps inside Jackson's City Hall, you'll see that the wall to the right has framed photos of all the city's white mayors. The framed photos to the left are all the city's more recent Black mayors. Nearly all levels of local governance in Jackson are now filled by Black people—from the county clerk to the judges to the tax collector to most of the city council. But even though Mississippi has the highest percentage of Black residents of any state, not a single statewide office has been held by a Black person since Reconstruction ended over 130 years ago.

The Blacker the city's leadership, the sharper the narrative spun by Mississippi's white, conservative state government. State-level leaders have said publicly that the people of Jackson cannot govern themselves. Mississippi Republican Governor Tate Reeves has disparaged the city and the "absolute and total incompetence" of Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba and alleged that the city has squandered the funding it received. Reeves repeatedly excluded Lumumba from press conferences about the city's water crisis, and his office claimed that Lumumba's administration was not a source of "honest information."

According to Frank Figgers, a third-generation Jacksonian and a veteran of the civil rights movement, this recalls the late 19th century, when the white leaders of Mississippi claimed that Reconstruction failed because Black people were "inept, irresponsible, and incapable of governing." The reality, of course, is that the forces of white supremacy violently overthrew Black political gains through intimidation, murder, voter suppression, and driving formerly enslaved people from their homes.

Reeves and the state Legislature have repeatedly turned down the city's requests for aid, including a $47 million emergency funding request in March 2021, just days after the winter freeze incapacitated Jackson's water system. "The state has been keenly aware of what's been happening in Jackson for a long period of time," says Conner, the NAACP environmental justice director. "And as Jackson became more and more Black, it's faced more and more obstacles in getting the resources that it needs. The state has intentionally weaponized funds against the communities who need them the most." A case in point: Mayor Lumumba says the lieutenant governor asked him to "give me my airport" in exchange for infrastructure funding. The city has been fighting the state's attempt to wrest control of Jackson's airport since 2016.



"Every time there is a mention of Jackson, there is this parental force that believes they should be the overseer."

—Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba

Now Republicans have introduced a bill in the Mississippi Legislature that aims to take ownership of the water system from the city and give it to the state. It will accomplish this through a nine-member board, four of whom would be appointed by the city in consultation with the surrounding suburbs and then confirmed by the state Senate. The bill prompted Lumumba to call out the state's "plantation politics." "It is a colonial power taking over our city," he said at a press conference in January. "Every time there is a mention of Jackson, there is this parental force that believes they should be the overseer of the city."

Senator Horhn, who is on the state Legislature's budget committee, places some of the blame on local leadership for "kicking the can down the road," but he adds that "the state should do more, especially at a time when we have $4 billion in non-obligated resources in our coffers." Horhn continues, "When we discussed our critical needs, I spoke about the critical needs of our capital city and offered a motion to dedicate at least $100 million towards those needs. The motion died for lack of a second."

Governor Reeves has justified these funding rebukes with statements like, "It's important that the City of Jackson start collecting their water bill payments before they start going and asking everyone else to pony up more money." Meanwhile, the lieutenant governor, Delbert Hosemann, asked a reporter with the *Mississippi Free Press*, "You remember during Kane Ditto's administration? He did repair work on water and sewer. So what happened since then?" (Ditto was Jackson's last white mayor.)

Municipal geyser: A broken water main floods Meadowbrook Road in Jackson in November 2022.

Jackson's Black mayors inherited a system in need of an overhaul. Before Harvey Johnson became mayor in 1997, he was an urban planner and the founder of a nonprofit that provided technical assistance on water infrastructure. Once in office, he spent nearly $150 million of mostly

"Yes, the system was understaffed. We've known that. We knew what was going to break."

—Kali Akuno
former director of special projects for Jackson

city funds to upgrade the system. What Johnson and successive administrations lacked was not knowledge or political will but the funds to do what was needed.

Jackson, like many other cities, relies on residents' water bills to maintain basic operations. But because of the city's meter problems, this revenue is unreliable. Cities fund larger upgrades and improvement projects by issuing municipal bonds. But Jackson's bond rating was downgraded to junk status in 2018 because of the city's poverty levels and its broken billing system. Cities with junk bond ratings are hard-pressed to issue bonds and can do so only by paying much higher interest rates.

In 2020, Lumumba put forward the Jackson Water Bill, which would have provided relief to residents with onerous or faulty bills and repaired the city's bond status by writing off some of its water bill debts. The bill unanimously passed in the Legislature but was vetoed by Reeves. The following year, the city proposed a 1 percent sales tax. Had it been implemented, the tax could have generated an estimated $14 million per year and been used to back larger bond issuances. But the bill died in the state Legislature without committee consideration.

Federal assistance for water infrastructure goes through the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund, a pot of money managed by the states. In Jackson's case, this sets up an obstructionist middleman between the city and those federal funds. A recent NAACP civil rights complaint against Mississippi for mishandling the Jackson water crisis points out that the state has granted DWSRF money to Jackson only three times since the program began 25 years ago. "For years, the state of Mississippi [has] discriminated on the basis of race against the city of Jackson, and its majority-Black population, by diverting federal funds...in favor of funding smaller, majority-white communities with less acute needs," the NAACP complaint noted.

Local organizers have long complained about the state's refusal to fund Jackson's infrastructure. Akuno, who worked for the late mayor Chokwe Lumumba (the current mayor's father), explains, "One of the lies that Tate Reeves is telling right now is that the city was trying to cover things up—that the system was totally mismanaged and that it was understaffed.

Street of dreams: During the Jim Crow era, Farish Street was an economic and cultural sanctuary for Jackson's Black community.

"Yes, it was understaffed," Akuno continues. "We've known that. We knew what was going to break. There were detailed reports that came from Public Works that said: 'This is broke, this is broke, this is broke; if this doesn't happen, this is going to break within this time; this is corroding; we don't have capacity here.' That was in 2014, almost a decade ago. And we made request after request. This blockage of resources has been there for the longest period of time."

Now federal legislation—the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the American Rescue Plan Act—is providing desperately needed funds to shore up the nation's infrastructure. But whether those funds will get to Jackson remains to be determined. Mississippi received $1.8 billion under ARPA, and the state has allocated only $180 million of that to water systems. Those funds have been slow to get out the door, and for Jackson, they come with strings: Mississippi's Legislature imposed extra oversight on the ARPA funds for Jackson (and for no other jurisdiction). Any money awarded to the city has to be kept in a fund controlled by the state treasury, overseen by both the Department of Finance and Administration and the Department of Environmental Quality.

Black Power Without Economic Power

"The story of race relations in our country is like what Newton said: For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction," says Patrice Willoughby, the NAACP's vice president of policy and legislative affairs. "As you see the ascendance of Black political power, there is pushback. It used to be very overt in the Jim Crow era. Now it's much more insidious, using the levers of government to create structural disadvantage."

Many Jacksonians see the current state of disinvestment as an outgrowth of white supremacy. As Primm, the bookseller, explains, "You have this mass exodus of whites leaving Jackson, first leaving the school system. But it's one thing to leave a school system—it's another thing to vandalize that system before you leave, so that what's left are no books and broken equipment, desks, and chairs. The same thing with the condition of the streets and the condition of the water. And it's purposeful, right?" she adds. "Yeah, it's a punishment for civil rights legislation enacted in Mississippi."

Indeed, Mississippi was the cradle of the civil rights movement, giving rise to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Freedom Summer, and countless other liberation struggles. In the 1970s, Black nationalists, the future mayor Chokwe Lumumba among them, founded the separatist organization Republic of New Afrika in Jackson.

The elder Lumumba recognized that without economic power, access to political power is insufficient to create transformative change. "Our administration has very little more control over the economic realities of our society than we did before we got in these positions," he said in an interview with *Jacobin* shortly before his death in 2014. "We have some technical influence," he continued, "but not real control." Now his son is the mayor—but constrained by the city's shrinking population, declining tax base, and decaying infrastructure, he's been left in the position, in Akuno's words, "of putting his finger in the dam."

Rukia Lumumba, the mayor's daughter and the director of the People's Advocacy Institute, puts it this way: "As soon as we take over a city—whether you're in Detroit or Newark or Jackson—you see it happen over and over again: a divestment of economic resources from Black, brown, and BIPOC communities. And without those resources, it makes it a lot harder to achieve our gains."

An Inflection Point

The United States is one of the few developed countries that doesn't treat its water system as a national utility. Instead, local bonds, occasionally supplemented by federal and state funds, finance a patchwork of 148,000 public water systems in the country (including 1,170 in Mississippi).

Federal regulation and funding for water systems peaked in the 1970s, allowing cities to invest in improvements to comply with new water quality standards. But that funding was cut dramatically in the 1980s, and federal infrastructure grants to states were phased out, replaced by a trickle of loans. By 2017, the federal government's share of total water infrastructure spending had fallen to less than 4 percent—its lowest point in 50 years, and down from a peak of 30 percent in 1977. And the remaining federal funds are often set up in a way that disadvantages low-income communities.

According to records requested from the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency denied Jackson a grant to repair equipment at its water plant after the 2021 winter storm. A MEMA representative explained that the city didn't receive the money because it had "deferred maintenance"—in other words, the city could not prove that the equipment had been properly maintained and therefore that the storm had caused the damage. But in Jackson's case, both were true: The winter storm damaged equipment that was already in disrepair.

Even when cities can access bonds and revolving funds, it leaves them on the hook.

Detroit, for example, has been saddled with $5.7 billion in bond debt for its water upgrades, while Birmingham, Ala., has accumulated $3.3 billion in debt. Meanwhile, federal funds flow through state coffers, leaving cities like Jackson at the mercy of state politics. As Jackson organizer Makani Themba tells me, state control over federal funding harks back to a "states' rights ideology rooted in the history of white power. So states get the money, and they make decisions about where the money goes." And in Mississippi, little of it goes to Black cities.

But while localities struggle to fund their systems, they are responsible for meeting water safety regulations. Over the past several years, Jackson has been slapped with repeated orders and noncompliance violations by the EPA and now the Department of Justice. "With Safe Drinking Water Act violations and other federal statutes, it's often Black cities who are more likely to have violations, even though the people who hold the ability to give them money for water infrastructure issues are at the state level. And the federal government has played a role in that counterintuitive narrative of who is to blame," the NAACP's Conner says. "It's frankly racist, because the communities that are most likely to be impacted are left to have to pick up the pieces of a system that isn't set up in their favor."

Water pressure: Rukia Lumumba of the People's Advocacy Institute speaks at a rally in front of the state Capitol in November 2022.

A Happy Ending?

Jackson's water system may still arrive at a happy ending. Public outcry inside and outside of Jackson has shone a desperately needed spotlight on the city's woes. Alongside the NAACP's civil rights complaint against the state, a congressional investigation was started by Mississippi Representative Bennie Thompson and now former New York representative Carolyn Maloney into whether the state has been starving the city of resources. The federal government has also stepped in to help manage the immediate crisis. In November, the EPA brokered an agreement between itself, the Justice Department, the city, and the state. The deal installs an interim third-party manager, Ted Henifin, to operate and manage the city's water system.

"You see it happen over and over again: a divestment of economic resources in Black communities."

—Rukia Lumumba, director of the People's Advocacy Institute

The federal government is giving Henifin $600 million

through the latest omnibus appropriations bill and wide latitude to operate without having to go through the Mississippi Capitol—though Republican leaders in the state have responded by introducing legislation that attempts to undermine Henifin's authority. Days after the state Senate introduced a bill to take over Jackson's water system, it passed another—clearly targeting Jackson—that mandates how cities calculate their water bills. If that legislation becomes law, it will stonewall Henifin's ability to apply workarounds to Jackson's broken metering system.

Under the federal agreement, the operation and management of the water system will continue to be funded by the city. But money for capital improvement (as well as Henifin's salary and those of other consultants) will come from the EPA through the appropriations bill, in addition to money allocated under the ARPA and the infrastructure bill. According to Conner, the order is "a step in the right direction," because funding will be "going directly to the city and bypassing the state, who we've been saying all along has been extremely obstructionist."

"They're sick and tired of being forced to drink and bathe and wash in nasty water."

—the Rev. William Barber II, cochair of the Poor People's Campaign

Nevertheless, Henifin's wide latitude includes the ability to raise water rates in Jackson should he deem it necessary without requiring the city's approval. And he will operate outside of any city or state agency and therefore will not be subject to Freedom of Information Act record requests. The order does at least prohibit him from selling any city asset to a private company—though it allows him to contract out maintenance operations. The vision for what comes after this temporary agreement—and how temporary it really is—remains murky. Henifin's position has no specific end date. When asked who will decide whether or when the city will be able to take over the water system's management again, Henifin replied, "I don't really know that answer, if that's the EPA or the judge. That's down the road."

Residents and organizers in Jackson have come together again and again to support one another through the city's continued water crises. Dozens of organizations in the Mississippi Rapid Response Coalition have distributed millions of bottles of water and other goods and have organized twice-monthly protests at the governor's mansion. Residents have, in Themba's words, "showed up for each other." She adds that calling them "heroic would be an understatement."

The Rev. William Barber II, who cochairs the Poor People's Campaign and travels regularly from North Carolina to Jackson to help lead rallies at the governor's mansion, tells me that residents there are fed up. But their efforts to save the city from state neglect could inspire the growing number of communities in similar fights. "The people in Jackson have come to a place where Fannie Lou Hamer was at when she said, 'I'm just sick and tired of being sick and tired.' They're sick and tired of being forced to drink and bathe and wash in nasty water," Barber says. "But this is not an isolated battle. In some ways, Jackson may become a launching pad for more movements across the country, wherever this problem exists." N

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(continued from page 17)

his research found "degeneration and cell necrosis" in fluted giant clams. The clams are listed as a "conservation dependent" species, because their natural habitat has been impacted by humans. "This change is thought to be influenced by heavy metals," he continued. "Heavy metal content in liquids exceeds the quality standard threshold." In another paper, he noted degradation in fish tissues. He also found levels of ammonia, nitrate, dissolved oxygen, nickel, and iron that exceed the water quality standards set by the government. In his conclusion, he described the findings as "a reference for warning of heavy metal pollution in Obi Island waters."

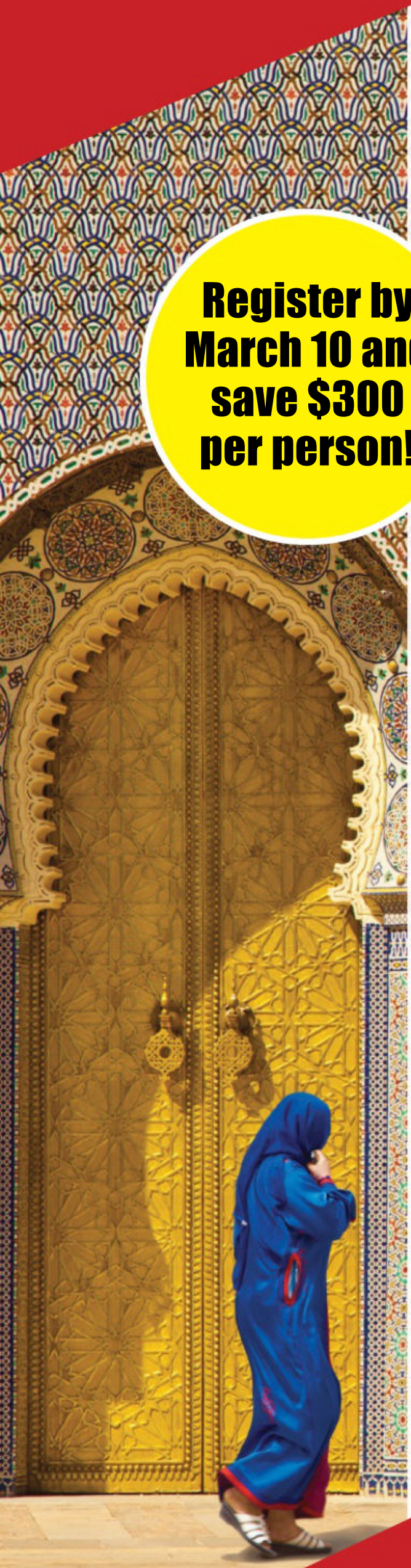
When it came time for Aris to publish his results, Harita contacted him. "They asked me to change the data," Aris told me. When he refused, the company tried to prevent the study from appearing. "They sent a letter to the university," Aris said, "and the rector spoke to me directly and told me not to publish that the water pollution level was over the limit." (Harita disputed this characterization; Khairun University did not respond to multiple e-mails seeking comment.) Aris decided to publish his findings despite the pressure. Since then, he has not received funding to conduct another study in Obi. And it is not just Aris who has said that the water is polluted: A separate water sample commissioned by *The Guardian* last year revealed that the cancer-causing chemical hexavalent chromium—of *Erin Brockovich* fame—was present in alarmingly high levels in water near the mine site.

When I visited Kawasi, the village nearest to the mine, early one morning this past December, I saw just how the landscape had been wrenched from wilderness to dystopia by Harita's nickel operations. Tall smokestacks belched gray and red smoke, and a river gushed reddish water into the blue sea. The heavy rain forced us ashore, prompting an admonition from my translator not to reveal that we were journalists, because, he said, security forces were in league with the mining company. Kahfi, the Laiwui chief, would later tell me that he was arrested and jailed for two months for protesting at the mine. Local journalists, he said, had also been detained after they approached the mine. A pair of Indonesian warships hung menacingly on the horizon.

Harita "sent a letter to the university, and the rector told me not to publish that water pollution was over the limit."

—Muhammed Aris

Our boat landed on a drab beach pocked with litter. Chickens picked at the plastic bottles and packaging. Despite the state-of-the-art nickel refining facility yards behind the town, there were no drains or trash collection, so the sea was used as a dump by the local population. Through the sheet of rain, we saw the glow of a fisherman's clove cigarette. He beckoned us onto the porch of his home. We watched the rain for hours and talked about how the company had plans to displace the people of Kawasi. When the rain stopped, the air began to reek and I tasted metal in my mouth. Far from any electric vehicle charging point, the people of the village revved up the diesel engines of their canoes and headed out to look for fish in the reddish murk. N



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The Right Distance

Janet Malcolm's autobiographical turn

BY VIVIAN GORNICK

"EVERY JOURNALIST WHO IS NOT TOO stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible." This sentence is among the most famous in American journalism. It first appeared as the lede in a two-part essay published by *The New Yorker* in 1989, and then again in 1990 when the essay was published as a short book called *The Journalist and the Murderer*. Its author was Janet Malcolm, who was on *The New Yorker*'s staff and

JANET MALCOLM (COURTESY OF FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX)

wrote lengthy profiles of writers, photographers, psychoanalysts, and many more of whom her writing alone made figures of note. When she died in 2021 at the age of 86, she left behind eight books of nonfiction, four essay collections, and a treasure trove of awards and honors that her work had garnered. The level of attention, positive and negative, that came Malcolm's way leaves no doubt that she was a significant figure on the American cultural scene.

Malcolm was a writer of intense likes and dislikes, and one of her most notorious prejudices was her dislike of what has come to be called "life writing." She thought the entire enterprise—whether biographical or autobiographical—meretricious. To write about oneself, especially, struck her as embarrassingly wrongheaded. Yet in the last years of her life, when she was sick and dying, she did exactly that. *Still Pictures: On Photography and Memory*, Malcolm's posthumous new book, is a collection of autobiographical essays (sketches, really) accompanied by photos (snapshots, really) that draws directly on Malcolm's memories of childhood and youth. True, many of these pieces were published in *The New Yorker* or *The New York Review of Books* before being compiled as a "memoir," but it's hard not to wonder whether Malcolm herself, had she been alive, would have wanted to see them published as a book.

Still Pictures
On Photography and Memory
By Janet Malcolm
Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
176 pp. $26

Born in Prague in 1934 into a family of Jewish professionals, Malcolm soon fled Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia with her mother, father, and sister, arriving in the United States in 1939, when she was 5. Her father was a doctor and the family culturally self-assured, so while they arrived without money and had to settle in a low-rent neighborhood on New York's Upper East Side, the parents successfully navigated the assimilationist climb for themselves and their girls. Janet attended The High School of Music and Art and then the University of Michigan. Within a decade after graduation, having already exhibited a taste for journalistic work, she had landed at *The New Yorker*, where she remained for the rest of her professional life, honing the literary nonfiction for which she became famous.

Malcolm wrote on everything for the magazine—Freud's Vienna, the New York art world in the '80s, Rachel Maddow in the era of Trump—but the essay that eventually became *The Journalist and the Murderer* has always been one of the best examples of the way she worked, the effects she achieved, and the influence she exerted. The book tells the complicated story of a sensational trial held in 1984, in which Jeffrey MacDonald, an Army doctor convicted of murdering his wife and children, sued the journalist Joe McGinniss for breach of contract and fraud. MacDonald had hired McGinniss to write a book that would persuade its readers of his innocence, and McGinniss had given MacDonald and his defense team every reason to believe that this was exactly what he intended to do. Then he turned the tables on them and wrote a book (*Fatal Vision*) that, if anything, persuaded its readers that the good doctor had indeed murdered his family; by the time the book was published, MacDonald had long been found guilty in a court of law and sent to jail. It was from his prison cell that he did this very unusual thing: He sued McGinniss. The case dragged on for three years until it went to trial and was settled out of court in 1987.

Malcolm did not attend the trial, but when it attracted her attention a year or so later, she found herself drawn by the moral dilemma the situation seemed to represent. Because the journalist's allegiance is inevitably to the story while the subject's, also inevitably, is to his or her own version of the truth, each one's motivation, Malcolm reasoned, is dangerously self-serving. It soon appeared to her that whenever a journalist and a subject got together, a deal was being made with the devil. Therefore, she concluded, the relationship between any journalist and any subject is inherently corrupt. The case was so unusual that, at first, Malcolm—who always needed some moral clarity to consult while exploring the unethical in a situation—didn't know how to orient herself. But once she had this thesis, she was home free.

The Journalist and the Murderer gave Malcolm a chance to practice her art full out, thereby providing her readers with a chance to experience the originality of the narrating persona she'd developed to tell this as well as any other of her stories. To begin with, it possessed a formidably concentrated intellect bent on organizing what was usually a vast amount of material—in the MacDonald-McGinniss case, thousands of pages of trial transcripts—containing a wealth of information that was then absorbed and interpreted as very few journalists could… or would. In the pages of the trial transcripts, Malcolm's penetrating eye uncovered undreamt-of connections among the various players, because it picked up on the merest hints of hidden involvement.

Together with its distinctive intellect, Malcolm's persona also possessed an equally distinctive temperament, one with a strong penchant for the negative. By which I mean that it operated like a cop at a lineup: From the start, everyone is under suspicion. With a large cast of characters (the lawyers alone!) at her disposal in the MacDonald-McGinniss case, Malcolm was able to inspect the character and motivation of nearly everyone involved, easily catching out this one's ignorance, that one's self-deception, a third's easily traced lies. It became a signature trait of hers: looking for (and finding) the incriminating flaw in whoever was standing in front of her.

This predilection could sometimes make the world she was surveying feel evenly divided between the mendacious and the severely stupid. In another writer's hands, that might become wearisome, but in hers it did not. The moral high ground assumed by Malcolm's persona provided a self-assurance that endowed her work with a strength that was hard to argue with. Out of that self-assurance, Malcolm fashioned some of the most memorable writing in American journalism. Her sentences, for instance, were incredibly clean. Cold, clear, and clean. It was as though they dared the reader to challenge them and,

Vivian Gornick is an essayist and critic. Her most recent book is Taking a Long Look: Essays on Culture, Literature, and Feminism in Our Time.

as a block of prose, seemed impervious to criticism. All in all, it was a remarkable performance.

It was only now and then that a sentence escaped the Malcolm persona that opened a seam in the garment of self-protection from within which she worked her magic. The title essay of her collection *Forty-One False Starts* contains just such a sentence. In it, we learn that Malcolm, in the 1990s, visited the artist David Salle repeatedly over a period of two years, often puzzling with him over the mystery of art: Why did one piece of creative work achieve that status while another did not? Malcolm herself was a collagist, and one day she brought Salle some samples of her own work, insisting that all she wanted was to be told whether or not they were art, and why. The experienced Salle knew that whatever he said wouldn't be the thing Malcolm really wanted to hear. The two went back and forth, with him hedging uncomfortably until at last Malcolm stopped asking questions. "Looking back on the incident," she writes in this essay, "I see that Salle had also seen what any first-year student of psychology would have seen—that for all my protests to the contrary I *had* brought them to be praised." I can imagine Malcolm brooding for some time over having let such an unguarded sentence appear under her name.

For Malcolm, autobiography was the most illegitimate of literary genres because, as she said in a fragment on the subject, it was always "an exercise in self-forgiveness"; inevitably, the narrator in an autobiography tells his story (it was always "his") "as a mother might." I remember being shocked when I came across these words. Surely, I thought, there is some memoir writing that belies this take-no-prisoners judgment; one book or another where the autobiographer creates a persona that implicates rather than excuses, one that serves rather than is served by the tale being told. Surely. But then, in the very same piece, Malcolm supplied the complicating factor in her own draconian view of the matter. True enough, she would always find biographical writing objectionable on literary grounds, but there was more to it than that. After working for more than 20 years, she wrote, with "one brilliant self-inventive collaborator after another" (her subjects), the thought of working in solitary—of suddenly finding herself "alone in the room," as she put it—made her shiver. It would, in fact, be "particularly hard for someone who probably became a journalist precisely because she didn't want to find herself alone in the room."

"Alone in the room": a loaded phrase if ever there was one. In the 17th century, Blaise Pascal said: "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." And in the 20th century, as though illuminating Pascal's stark insight, Hannah Arendt said of solitude that it was probably the salvation of humanity, because it is the only circumstance in which we keep ourselves company while we indulge in what Arendt considered most worthwhile: thinking. The whole aim of life was to have a self to converse with when in a solitary state. One wants, in fact, to live in a culture that values the idea that we have inner lives to consult while alone reflecting.

It has always seemed to me that good writing, imaginative writing—whatever the style, purpose, or genre—inevitably reveals a consciousness (a persona, if you will) that, in essence, is alone with itself in that empty room, trying to make some larger sense of insights that originate in one's feelings but assume shape and meaning through a metaphorical context that supplies a deepening of both world and self. I count the memoir and the personal essay among those genres capable of generating such insights, nourished by a surround greater than the one occupied by petty self-absorption. One's feelings, after all, are only of instrumental use in any serious piece of writing. Ultimately, the goodness of the memoir—like the goodness in any other genre—will turn on those words and phrases that, in accommodating the larger context, deliver the expressiveness necessary for a genuine reading experience.

For Malcolm, autobiography was the most illegitimate of literary genres.

The pieces that make up *Still Pictures* include descriptive accounts of Malcolm's father and mother (separately and together), the family leaving Europe, Czech émigrés who come to visit in New York, a bad-girl school friend, a few pages on New York's public schools, another few pages on summer camp, and a number of brief profiles of men and women who are remembered with varying degrees of warmth. Almost all the pieces are three to eight pages in length; all are possessed of charm and delicacy; and in all of them the young Janet is the character upon whom rests the burden of insight and resolve, the one to whom life is happening. Yet in almost all instances, the piece will be long on description, short on analysis, and more than somewhat vague in intent. If ever a book wished to see the light of day at the same time that it didn't, this is it.

Interestingly, when Malcolm herself looked over her first attempts at autobiography, she judged them inadequate because, in her words, "Not only have I failed to make my young self as interesting as the strangers I have written about, but I have withheld my affection." After reading the collection, I felt obliged to agree with her. Malcolm does withhold affection from her long-ago self, and as a result the most important element in memoir writing—a satisfying persona—is missing. One piece, however, "Sam Chwat," is fully achieved, and it is the exception that proves the rule.

In 1983 Malcolm wrote "Trouble in the Archives," an essay about a psychoanalyst named Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson. When the article was published, Masson took offense and sued Malcolm (as well as *The New Yorker* and the book publisher Knopf). The case went to trial and the verdict went against Malcolm, but the jury became deadlocked over the question of compensation, so a mistrial was declared and another trial ordered.

Malcolm was very distressed over her own performance in court. She realized that she had wrapped herself in a mantle of *New Yorker* superiority that had alienated the jury, and now, given a miraculous second chance at a new trial, she decided to consult Sam Chwat, a speech therapist known for brilliantly guiding his clients through a public personality change. Malcolm's piece about Chwat describes her time with him—the weeks in which he worked to undo the dam-

age done by her first, prideful performance, teaching her how to walk, talk, and dress so that this time around she would gain the jury's trust and sympathy. Malcolm's writing here is wonderfully open, entirely free of defensiveness or self-protection; she seems genuinely interested in dismantling her own injurious behavior and learning from it. Altogether, the piece does for the reader what Chwat does for Malcolm, delivering a felt account of a transformative experience. The second trial took place in 1994, and this time the jury found in Malcolm's favor. I could not identify another piece in *Still Pictures* as successful as "Sam Chwat."

Speaking to the reader from the right distance is a major responsibility for a writer.

Clearly, Malcolm was of two minds about writing these accounts. On the one hand—and this is a sure sign that she is not herself in this book—she is amiable to a fault, at pains to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. On the other hand, she reveals time and again that she sees these memories not as an opportunity to explore the past but rather as a threat against which she must guard herself—as though dangerous revelations are just waiting to pour out of her, revelations that spell betrayal. Above all, she seems to dread the thought that she might be seen as trashing a friend or evening a score or, worse yet, humiliating a parent. In this regard, her father, whom she adored, is much on her mind.

At every turn, Malcolm tells us how kind, gentle, and intelligent her father was. In fact, no one she has ever known comes anywhere near this paragon of superior character. Then, in a piece called "Daddy," she suddenly hints at feelings more complicated than she has been willing to acknowledge. "My mind is filled with lovely plotless memories of him. The memories with a plot are, of course, the ones that commit the original sin of autobiography.... They are the memories of conflict, resentment, blame, self-justification—and it is wrong, unfair, inexcusable to publish them. 'Who asked you to tarnish my image with your miserable little hurts?' the dead person might reasonably ask." Later in a different essay, we are told about a friend of the family who was scolded by Malcolm's father for leaving food on her plate at the end of a meal, whereupon her mother was mortified. Her father had fallen from grace, but instead of reflecting on the episode, Malcolm only wonders why the memory of it has stayed with her—and concludes that it is in the nature of memory to be capricious! "That this scene...should have remained with me over a lifetime," she writes, "is a measure of memory's willful atavism."

In other words: I refuse to investigate a moment when my father seems less than perfect, but I also can't lay it to rest, so, dear reader, I'll just dump it in your lap and hope for the best. In fact, let me tell you right now that I'm not going to make sense in your presence of any emotional difficulty I have, because I trust neither you nor myself.

Remembering a piece of Italian china she bought long ago for the apartment where she met with the married lover who eventually became her husband, Malcolm writes: "What did it mean to me? Why did it come to mind after so many years? I know the answer, but—like a balky child—I find myself reluctant to give it. I would rather flunk a writing test than expose the pathetic secrets of my heart."

And there we have it.

Speaking to the reader from just the right distance—not too far, not too close—is a major responsibility for a writer, one far more easily achieved when the writer is speaking through surrogates, as in a fiction or a literary nonfiction, rather than through one's own undisguised self. The voice that is speaking to us in *Still Pictures* has not found that perfect place from which to address us. It comes from way too far away. It often can seem disengaged, even to the point of having no agency at all—and without agency, of course, one cannot put felt life on the page. Many writers, novelists especially, distrust the memoir and as a result never find the right place in which to stand when writing one. In this regard, Janet Malcolm is far from alone. N

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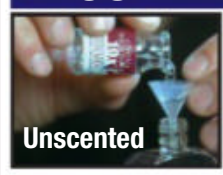

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The Unfulfilled Promise

Peniel Joseph's history of the three Reconstructions

BY ROBERT GREENE II

WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING MODERN POLITICS, analogies abound. We have the 1938 Munich conference as a metaphor for the perils of being "weak" on foreign policy. Modern hyper-partisanship has driven comparisons to the 1850s and the lead-up to the Civil War. With the combination of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests, and a new wave of strikes roiling the nation, scholars and journalists have compared our current moment to the 1918 influenza pandemic and the following year's Red Summer, when the United States appeared to be on fire with strikes and protests from coast to coast.

One of the most potent analogies has been that of Reconstruction. The term was coined during the Civil War to describe the plan to readmit the secessionist states and push the South to transition to a post-slavery economy. It took on a new life in the 1950s and '60s, when civil rights activists and observers began to refer to a "Second Reconstruction." For them, the first had been an incomplete revolution: Black men gained the right to vote and Black people in general became—however fitfully—part of the American body politic, but these gains were soon dismantled by white Southern violence and political intimidation and white Northern indifference. The radicals of the 1950s and '60s set out to try again, hoping to both expand and finish the job of the first Reconstruction 100 years later. In his famous speech in Montgomery, Ala., celebrating the culmination of the Selma to Montgomery marches and the 1965 voting rights campaign, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. laid out the case for the importance of the first Reconstruction and the urgent need for a second one. Describing the end of Reconstruction as a "travesty of justice," King stated in defiance of Southern segregationists that "we are on the move now."

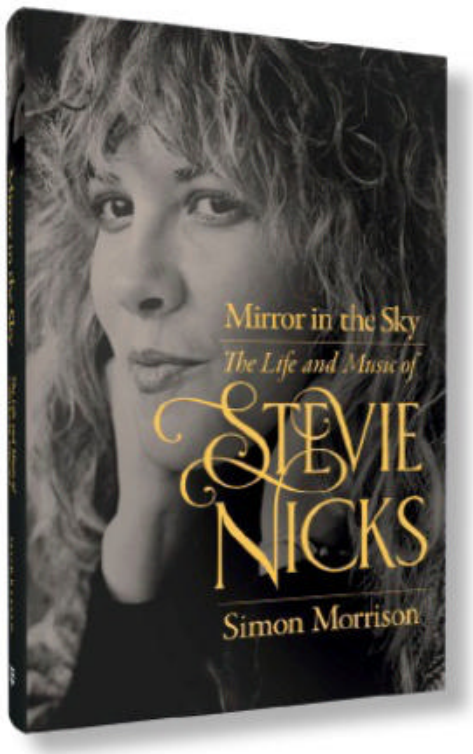
Much was achieved during this Second Reconstruction, but like the first it remained unfinished. The economic disparities between Black and white Americans continued to be a major problem. Meanwhile, an ascendant right challenged the victories of the civil rights movement, even as legal segregation was destroyed. As C. Vann Woodward, the eminent historian of the South, presciently noted in a 1965 essay in *Harper's*, there would likely come a time when the American polis would recognize the need for a Third Reconstruction. Woodward revised and republished the *Harper's* piece in a book of essays, *The Burden of Southern History*, in 1968. "It may be that in due course," Woodward wrote, "say on the eve of the Third Reconstruction, some enterprising historian will bring out a monograph on the Compromise that ended the Second Reconstruction, entitled perhaps *The Triumph of Tokenism*."

Woodward's premonition comes to mind when reading Peniel Joseph's new book, *The Third Reconstruction: America's Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century*. A scholar of the Black Power movement, Joseph turns his attention here to Black America's plight since the beginning of the 1980s. For Joseph, not to mention many others, the need to reckon with the history of the last 40 years is paramount if we are to finally complete the work of Reconstruction. Inspired by the events of Barack Obama's presidency, the rise of Black Lives Matter in the 2010s, the crises of Covid and the January 6 insurrection, and his own early life experiences, Joseph offers a book that seeks to understand the post–civil rights history of Black America.

THE BLACK PANTHERS' LIBERATION SCHOOL, SAN FRANCISCO, 1969 (UPI / GETTY)

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

ICONIC WOMEN, ICONIC LIVES



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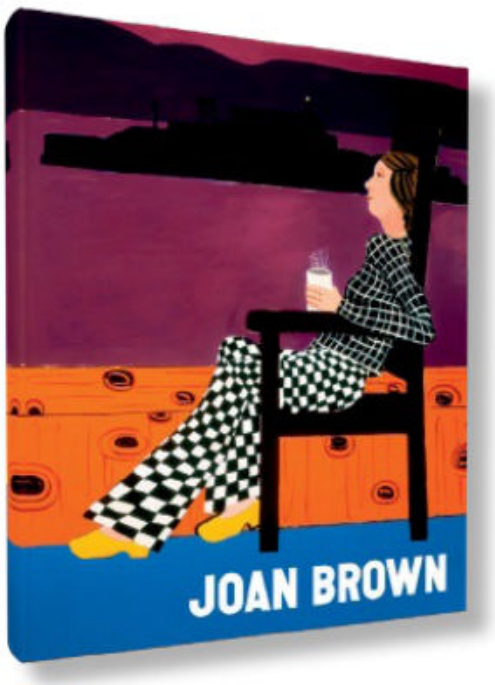

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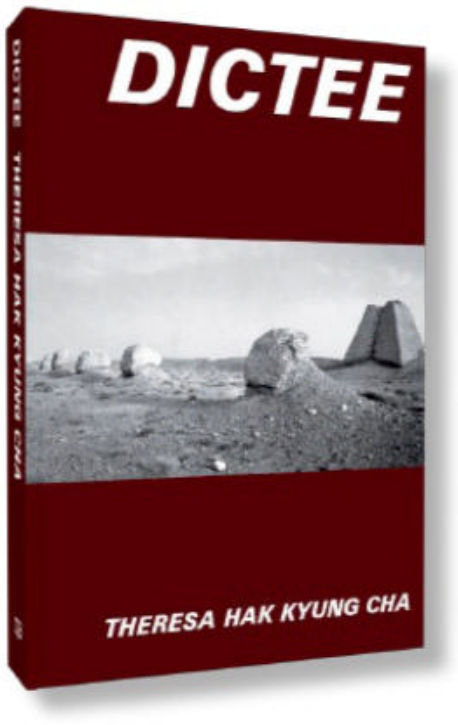

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's original vision for her foundational and unparalleled text.

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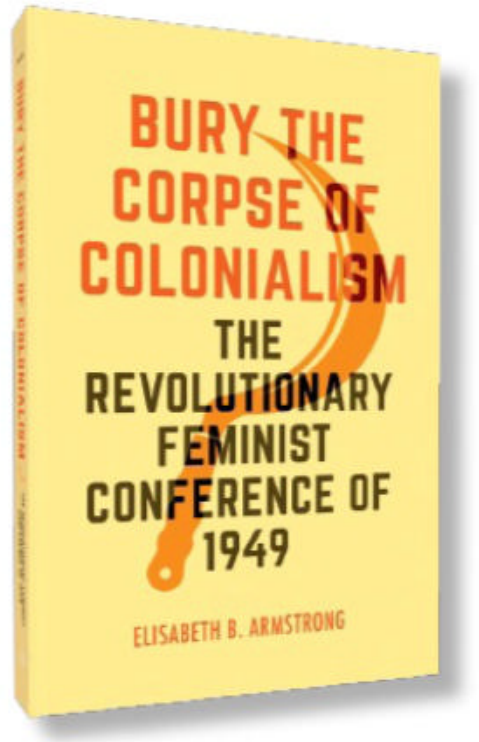

An intimate look at the 1949 Asian Women's Conference, and its influence on feminist anticolonialism around the world.

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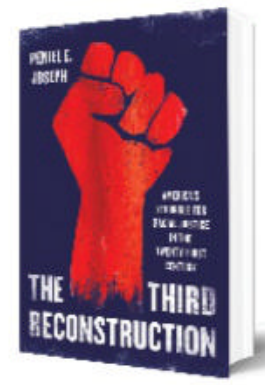
The origins of his career as a historian, Joseph tells us, can be found in the classrooms of New York City in the 1980s and in his home, growing up with a mother of Haitian descent. He could not understand how life could be so difficult for the young men and women who looked like him when, at the same time, the teachers at his Catholic school were telling him and the other students of the greatness of America during and after the civil rights movement. "I began to notice this gap in our perceptions," Joseph writes, explaining in a short but powerful statement what it means to be Black in America. The promise of the civil rights and Black Power era remained unfulfilled, and so Black Americans—and the rest of the country—needed to renew the struggle to secure what the Reconstructions of the past had tried but failed to achieve.

Joseph has spent much of his career pushing Americans to reexamine what they think they know about the Black Power movement of the 1960s and '70s. Currently, he serves in several roles at the University of Texas at Austin: as the Barbara Jordan Chair in Ethics and Political Values; as an associate dean for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion; and as the founding director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy. His first book, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, was a landmark text that tied together the resurgence of Black nationalism in the 1950s and the rise of the Nation of Islam in the early 1960s, the Black Panthers in the late '60s, and the Pan-Africanists in the 1970s.

Since then, Joseph has written about such figures as Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) in *Stokely: A Life* and argued against accounts that posit a simplistic and ideologically hostile relationship between MLK and Malcolm X in *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* In his 2010 work *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*, Joseph explored how the post–Voting Rights Act era became a radical moment of political, cultural, and intellectual debate among Black Americans.

Now, in *The Third Reconstruction*, Joseph extends his work on Black Power and Black life in post–World War II America to the present by insisting that a clear understanding of the 1980s and '90s is necessary to grasp the current social movements for freedom in America. In many ways, *The Third Reconstruction* expands and develops the arguments found in Manning Marable's *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America*. Revised several times, with its subtitle changing to reflect the updates, Marable's book tracks the growing frustration with the achievements of the civil rights movement among a new generation of Black scholars and activists. The first edition was released in 1984, the second in 1991. By 2007, when the third (and final) edition was published, Marable had had time to reflect on how much his own thinking had changed in the past 25 years. In the book's first edition, he argued that by 1982, the civil rights gains of the '60s and '70s were under threat from "the triumph of Reaganism." In a revised chapter for the 1991 edition, Marable argued that "in many respects the state of American race relations reached a new nadir in the late 1980s and early 1990s." By the 21st century, he was offering an even grimmer view: After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, he could see that his earlier assessments had not fully appreciated how much work was still needed to fix the United States. "The awful specter of black bodies floating in New Orleans," he wrote, "of hundreds of thousands being dispersed throughout the country and being denied constructive federal aid, underscored just how enduring the great racial and class divides are within the fabric and logic of American institutions of power."



The Third Reconstruction
America's Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century
By Peniel E. Joseph
Basic Books.
288 pp. $27

In *The Third Reconstruction*, Joseph extends his work on Black Power into the present.

In many ways, Joseph picks up where Marable left off. Reflecting on the difficulty of the historical parallels he hopes to draw in *The Third Reconstruction*, he agrees with Marable that the two earlier Reconstructions did not go far enough. While the country's problems in the 1970s and '80s weren't the same as those in the 1870s, Joseph does note some troubling parallels. In the 1860s and '70s, the brief hopeful period of Reconstruction was overwhelmed by the long era of Redemption and then by Jim Crow segregation, while in the 1960s and '70s, the country saw the destruction of most Black radical political organizations, the assassination of numerous Black leaders, and a broader right-wing attack on the achievements of the civil rights and Black Power movements. Figures like Julian Bond, an activist turned Democratic Party politician in Georgia, repeatedly lamented the erosion of these gains in the late 1970s and the '80s, especially during Ronald Reagan's presidency. In 1982, Bond argued against Reagan's attempt to weaken the Voting Rights Act that year, saying: "If the president prevails, voting rights will perish, and black Americans will be a voteless—and a hopeless—people once again."

Joseph experienced firsthand the on-the-ground stakes of this reality. Coming of age during the Reagan era, he grew up in a New York City that was defined by Reagan's conservatism on race and the welfare state, along with an expanding War on Drugs. For Joseph, Barack Obama's election in 2008 represented the promise of "a new vision of US citizenship," one that would live up to the nation's greatest statements on freedom and democracy. Instead, Joseph argues, Trump's election after the Obama era became a reminder that "white backlash contains multitudes." But the Obama years also ushered in the Black Lives Matter movement, which continued the long Black radical tradition of keeping America honest about its many issues with race and democracy.

Robert Greene II is an assistant professor of history at Claflin University and has written for Jacobin, In These Times, *and* Dissent.

One of the strengths of *The Third Reconstruction* is how carefully Joseph captures the history that was taking place during his adolescence. He spares no one among the country's political leaders, criticizing Democratic presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton for their inability to escape the neo-Redemptionist ideas inherent in the "law and order" rhetoric popularized by Richard Nixon in the late 1960s. The frustrations with Carter in the late 1970s among Black leaders and lay citizens alike, Joseph notes, were early warnings about the lack of progress for Black Americans after the civil rights era. Clinton, of course, proved far worse: He used his own brand of law-and-order politics, crafted by the Democratic Leadership Council and the party's moderate wing, to propel the Democrats back into the White House after 12 years in the political wilderness. "A bipartisan consensus forged in the maelstrom of America's Second Reconstruction," Joseph writes, "substituted racially charged symbols—of crime, drug addiction, welfare, public schools, the King holiday—over dismantling structural racism."

For Joseph, all of this appeared to be changing with Obama's election, given how much he had spoken of the need to take action on the long-festering issues of racial inequality. But very quickly, Joseph notes, Obama's vision of hope began to collide with political realities: His call for "national unity became entangled with the cords of America's racial past, which hindered its fulfillment in both new and tragically familiar ways." Obama needed to take bold and decisive action to address the nation's political, social, and cultural wounds, and yet he did the exact opposite. The actions needed to remake the United States into a true democracy would be difficult, and Obama proved unwilling to embrace the conflict that would come with it. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement marked a growing frustration with Obama, but as Joseph observes, the few gains that were won during the Obama years also created a space for the rise of a white nationalism that found its voice in Donald Trump. "Seeking to redeem America from the scourge of Black equality," Joseph writes, "Trump and his supporters looked less to Nixon than to the Reconstruction-era South Carolina demagogue Ben Tillman and his violent supporters."

Joseph compares Trump's neo-Redemptionist rise with that of Tillman, who became South Carolina's governor and later senator. Working as part of the "Red Shirts" in the 1870s, Tillman led the white supremacist violence that disrupted and ultimately destroyed Black political power in the state for generations. As South Carolina's governor in the 1890s, he spearheaded the effort to draft a new state constitution that would end Black voting rights without technically violating the language of the new 14th and 15th amendments to the US Constitution. The 1895 state Constitution would do just that, replacing the more progressive 1868 Constitution adopted during Reconstruction. In a speech on the floor of the US Senate in 1900, Tillman boasted that this suppression of Black votes was his goal: "Then we had a constitutional convention convened which took up the matter calmly, deliberately, and avowedly with the purpose of disenfranchising as many of them as we could under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments."

The failures of the first two Reconstructions demand the success of a third.

Trump did not seek to completely dismantle Black voting rights, nor was he as successful at achieving the frightening rollback of basic freedoms that Tillman and his followers sought. But he did "normalize white supremacy in contemporary American politics," Joseph notes, through his lukewarm response to the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017, where one person was killed and dozens more injured in a car attack on the anti-racist counterprotesters, as well as through his utilization of the kind of white supremacist rhetoric once consigned to the margins of the far right.

Placing Trump in the tradition of Tillman, as well as the massacre in Hamburg, S.C., in 1876 and the Wilmington Coup of 1898, makes clear how dangerous he is not just to Black Americans but to the basic ideas of democracy, self-determination, and civil and political rights. But that means we should also reconsider whether this is indeed a Third Reconstruction or, potentially, another reversal in the struggle for Black freedom and equality. In 2010, *The Black Scholar* published "The New Nadir: The Contemporary Black Racial Formation," by the historian Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, in which he argued that despite the election of the nation's first Black president, the material conditions of Black Americans had only gotten worse in the wake of the Great Recession of 2009. "What is needed," Cha-Jua concluded, "is a political strategy and a social movement that seek to coordinate and redeploy blacks' social capital to rebuild, revitalize, and democratize black civil society." Joseph agrees: What Cha-Jua, and Marable before him, diagnosed as the failures of the first two Reconstructions demands the success of a new one.

Throughout *The Third Reconstruction*, Joseph compares Black Lives Matter to the civil rights and Black Power movements. Referring to the protests that swept the nation in 2020 after George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police, Joseph writes: "Black equality as the beating heart of American democracy proved to be the central message behind the largest social justice mobilization in American history." But what makes Black Lives Matter different, in his estimation, is that by "shedding the political shortcomings that had plagued the two earlier periods of Reconstruction," it was able to "embrac[e] the full complexity of Black identity."

Joseph takes pains to honor the Black women and the members of the LGBTQ community who have been instrumental in today's social movements. That Black Lives Matter has done so too, he argues, is one of its greatest strengths and gives him cause not to despair. We must not be shackled by the past, he declares, but at the same time, the past gives us reason to imagine a better future—one defined by a Reconstruction that has lasting power. "Today, in the midst of another period of Reconstruction," Joseph writes, "we have a grave political and moral choice to make. I choose hope." N

A Profession!

What has become of literary studies?

BY NICHOLAS DAMES

THE SCENE: A GRADUATE SEMINAR IN LITERATURE SOMEtime in the eerily becalmed days of the mid-1990s, when for an aspirant to an academic job, the future seemed poised to break in one of two directions—either the long-promised wave of retirements and a deluge of open positions, or a decisive sign that the hiring trend line was never going to reverse its downward course. Imagine not quite knowing what would happen—even if that is now, in fact, very hard to do. Imagine, with even greater difficulty, sitting in that seminar as a widely read, charismatic literary theorist stood explaining that our line of work was a profession—one that involved duties and allegiances that extended well beyond the separate institutions that would support our existence in the form of paid employment. The place where the person worked was not all that important; we would be judged—and rewarded—elsewhere.

A *profession*! To a graduate student at that time, the word had an alluring ring, naming a desire no one wanted to admit because of how unreal the possibility seemed and how embarrassing it felt to hold out hope that it might come true. Yet it sounded like belonging—suggesting the presence of readers, beyond just one's teachers, who would read what you had to say. It sounded like plane tickets, and symposia, and honorifics floating in the air.

It's not entirely a trick of memory, I think, to say that our seminar leader's invitation into the temple of professional life raised more questions than it answered. The invocation of the "profession" of literary study seemed like a well-intentioned mystification. When did literary study become a profession? How did it differ, as an academic vocation, from the world of freelance literary journalism and magazine criticism, and how, in turn, did it relate to the institution from which it emerged—the university? And, finally, what were the costs of this academic professionalization, and were they worth paying when there didn't seem to be much of a profession left?

To explain the historical process in which a field of specialized work emerges requires a great deal of demystification. John Guillory's *Professing Criticism* aims to do this very task. Its goal is to understand how the practice of criticism, which flourished in the journalism of the 19th century, became a university discipline. What, Guillory asks, were the historical forces over the centuries that produced, out of a welter of disciplinary arrangements—rhetoric, belles lettres, philology—a fairly recent phenomenon, the academic profession of literary criticism? As his account shows, those forces were partly internal: A professionalized literary criticism came into being in order to distill the new meanings of "literature" in the wake of the fading social utility of Greek and Latin literacies starting in the 18th century. As literature began to encompass an ever-widening array of vernacular writing, and as a middle class began to read this literature, professionals were needed to codify and inculcate the skills involved in this newly delineated intellectual labor. There were also significant external causes, namely the rise in the Progressive era of a cadre of bureaucratized experts—engineers, administrators, lawyers, doctors, and others—who served the middle class and who embraced new modes of credentialed distinction in order to distinguish their work from nonspecialized and working-class labor. Many still practiced a literary criticism that remained outside

ILLUSTRATION BY **TIM ROBINSON**

academic institutions, but Guillory is particularly interested in those who hived criticism off from the realm of journalism and sought to make it a distinct and credentialed form of work.

Guillory's story has much to tell us about the fortunes of this professional criticism and how it became inextricable from a larger sociology of professionalization. But its primary interest now is that the phenomenon he describes may be reaching its terminus. We are far enough past the 1990s to know which route the story took from there: Retirements led to the widespread casualization of the academic labor market rather than a boom in tenure lines. The study of languages and literatures underwent a decline in status; college education became impossible to separate from mass indebtedness. Meanwhile, newly empowered right-wing state legislatures slashed the budgets of humanities departments at public institutions that were increasingly tuition-dependent, pushing students into vocational majors better suited for the world after the 2008 financial crisis, one in which knowledge work was tied to the domain of tech entrepreneurialism. It would be hard for a member of an English department not to feel, looking back on the past few decades, like Tony Soprano telling his therapist, "I'm getting the feeling that I came in at the end." The questions Guillory poses, then, have a long history but a new urgency before what seems like a precipice: Will literary studies continue as a professional activity, and if so, in what form? And might professionalism itself inhibit the changes that need to happen in the field?

Professing Criticism
Essays on the Organization of Literary Study
By John Guillory
University of Chicago Press. 456 pp. $29

Guillory is ideally suited to serve as a guide to the polycrisis that literary studies faces, because he is the profession's great disenchanter. He came to prominence in the early 1990s with his landmark study *Cultural Capital*, a sociology of academic literary criticism. The book applied the theories of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to survey how specific kinds of cultural knowledge confer status and power, and how institutions—particularly the school—help distribute this kind of capital, which exists not in opposition to economic capital but in a complicated relation of interdependence with it. What followed from this framing was a brilliant act of desublimation aimed at an earlier crisis of authority in the humanities, often referred to as the "canon wars."

The canon wars centered on a debate over the continued viability of canonical literatures, a delayed reaction to the new social movements of the 1960s and '70s that hit the academy when the children of those movements and a newly diversified professoriate arrived in enough numbers, and with enough power, to call for either the widening or the eradication of the traditional literary canon. The debates over method that roiled the discipline at the same time, over such innovations as the deconstructive emphasis on the deferral of meaning or the new forms of historicism that reconnected canonical texts to their "context" within nonliterary discourses, did not in principle rule out the canon and often addressed themselves to it in practice—but they all provided the means by which to imagine intellectual activity divorced from it. And so the canon did not disappear, but instead entered a fraught, precarious phase.

What was at stake during these years was not simply what was on the reading list or how, once that was agreed on, to read this list. For most literary scholars, what was up for debate was the very purpose of the profession. Instead of serving as guardians of cultural tradition, academic critics now embraced the idea of critique. As with many other fields that had absorbed the radicalism of the '60s and '70s into their ranks, literary scholars wanted their discipline to play its part in dismantling society's hierarchical structures, of which the canon was one. Guillory called this the "curricular allegory": the idea that expanding or changing the literary syllabus might achieve this aim rather than a politics that would almost certainly require action outside the academy.

In a steely, scrupulous tone, Guillory made the case that these canon revisions, however justified, displayed the field's exaggerated sense of its own political agency, because it ignored the fact that the canon wars themselves occurred within the site of the school: a place fenced off from most of society and certainly not one that might radically change it. A syllabus, regardless of its contents, reproduced status distinctions. A more inclusive and egalitarian syllabus might broaden the canon but would not remove the stratifications of class; it would simply ratify a new kind of hierarchy. Until the canon wars could be reconceived as a question of widening access to cultural goods per se, Guillory argued, the debate—as well as the larger profession of academic criticism—would be doomed merely to repeat the theme of the unequal distribution of cultural capital.

In the end, *Cultural Capital* had a peculiar fate: It was one of the most widely read and admired books of the 1990s, and yet it had almost no practical effect. The canon wars did not dissipate; instead, as Guillory observes in *Professing Criticism*, they have only intensified into a "domestic forever war." The conflict's persistence, he adds, has in fact become a compensatory source of vitality for a profession facing a rapid status collapse. Literature, that is, no longer provides the cultural capital it did even as recently as 30 years ago. Guillory had warned back then of what he called the "capital flight in the domain of culture" newly apparent among the profession's primary clientele, the professional-managerial class. With the dwindling cultural status of literary genres older than electronic media—particularly the receding importance of the novel, which for half a century at least had been the literary profession's primary connection to a wider culture—the link between the haute bourgeoisie, now thoroughly integrated with mass media culture, and literature as a mode of distinction had ceased to apply. Canon revision could not be a solution to this tectonic drift.

Disenchantment is a great teacher, and Guillory is a master of its tones and maneuvers, yet it may be less effective as a guide to action, since it can be hard to apply its lessons. One might very well acknowledge

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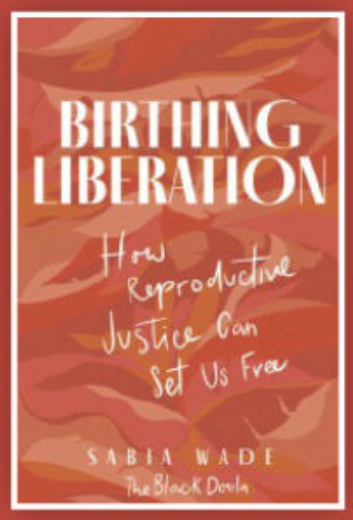

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that the primary function of the school is to reproduce cultural capital, while at the same time feeling that the transactions of day-to-day life within it can act in a more orthogonal, or even just chaotic, manner than that function would seem to dictate. It is perhaps still possible at that smaller scale to bring to bear various lived commitments—or at least to find a space within the university to reflect, ironically or agonistically, on the social function one serves despite oneself. But these daily resistances may not add up to much; they may instead be modes of evasion or deferral.

Professing Criticism is a response to the situation that *Cultural Capital* had failed to change. But Guillory has not abandoned the arguments of his earlier book—far from it. Back into the fray he goes, asking scholars to forgo the magical thinking of the curricular allegory and instead attempt to "democratize the curriculum" by expanding what is taught in the English literature classroom—particularly with regard to the literatures of global English—in order to outline a "global cultural commons" of literary English in which center and periphery can no longer be taken for granted as stable positions. The goal, Guillory argues, should not be symbolic representation but rather equality of access to cultural goods. This would involve just as much selection and even deletion as an anti-canonical position, given the proliferation of global English and the limited space of a syllabus, but with a different ethic: to outline a cosmopolitan history of writing in English in which works can be allowed to exceed their political-thematic function.

Reading these arguments in *Professing Criticism*, one can't help but feel that Guillory knows his argument is even lonelier now than it was 30 years ago. The idea of representation that underwrites the curricular allegory is stronger than ever, informing virtually every debate in the arts. And even if we come to agree that the representational basis for syllabus revision is politically inert, it turns out that the right-wing enemies of canon revision do not concur. Just in the last few years, we've gone from ineffectual howls of protest at the inclusion of Toni Morrison on college reading lists to the active banning of her books in secondary school libraries. When your enemies agree about the importance of the terrain you're battling over, it's hard to concede it or shift your emphasis elsewhere. The literary scholar remains tethered as a result to the terms of the canon wars, whose tactics at least seem under their direct control. Enhancing access to a global cultural commons in English—which in practice means enhancing access to the college classroom and the cultural goods distributed there—is much less in their power.

Will literary studies continue as a professional activity?

So, for Guillory, the canon-wars quagmire continues, and not simply as a result of contemporary political exigencies but—his most sobering argument—as a result of the original sin of professionalization itself. When literary studies became professionalized at the turn of the 20th century, conforming to a widespread professionalization of knowledge work, it ensured the discipline a relative autonomy: the ability to control its labor market through the intrinsic evaluative procedures of a self-constituted "expert culture," such as peer review and tenure. That autonomy, Guillory argues, produced economic as well as symbolic benefits. It allowed the literary profession to cater to the demands of the emergent New Class, as Alvin Gouldner called the broad stratum of ascendant middle-class knowledge workers that formed in the later 19th century. It also allowed the profession to remain partially distinct, nominally committed to values that were less instrumental: aesthetic sophistication, self-critique, political allegiances beyond liberalism. Professional autonomy enabled both the freedom of proliferating sub-specialties and the safety of the stable, long-term "career." And it had other benefits to offer as the 20th century unspooled, particularly an ethic of formal equality that permitted the gradual if halting assimilation of new social groups into its ranks. One is tempted to say that it was a good deal, while it lasted.

Yet no matter the kind of work, Guillory argues, professional autonomy can also have considerable negative consequences. It deforms as much as it forms: By defending its partial exemption from either state control or the labor market's unfettered logic, a profession like literary scholarship and criticism develops a "compensatory overestimation" of its social effects. Staking out autonomy produces a ferociously inflated sense of self-worth. And there's a tendency for the rate of such rhetorical efficacy to decrease, particularly because what Guillory takes to be the profession's aggrandized sense of social importance stems paradoxically from its political self-enclosure in the school. It's a losing game, but one that is almost impossible to avoid playing: purchasing autonomy at the price of an inflationary rhetoric of self-justification.

The specific genealogy of the literary profession also exaggerated this tendency in ways that did not occur in other fields. In Guillory's careful outlining of this history, literary studies—or what was long known as "English"—became first an academic department and then a profession

that was turned inward to the institution of the college and outward to a self-regulating cadre of credentialed experts. What literary studies skipped in its rapid fin-de-siècle professionalization was a sense of itself as a discipline organized by a particular object of study. This was partly because that object was shared by a sizable number of critics who had remained outside the academy. The Edmund Wilsons, say, or the Mary McCarthys and James Baldwins—the successors to the pre-professionalized literary world before the rise of the English department—could be, and indeed were, effective at maintaining literature's status with the public. This freed the academic literary professional to pursue methodological sophistication instead, as part of an internal, techno-bureaucratic rivalry with the physical and social sciences.

What developed as a result was a kind of torus, a vocation with a hole at its center. In the long summer of what Guillory calls the "postwar settlement" in literary studies, it provided the field with the freedom to claim primacy among the humanistic subjects. But by gradually detaching itself from a consensual object of study—moving from "literature" to "literary language" or even language tout court—the profession guaranteed that its legitimation to any wider public would become grandiose, abstract, insufficiently distinct. Worse news follows. If professionalization was the flaw in the construction of the bridge, making it unstable, it turns out there's a meteor heading for the bridge anyway: the steady diminution of literature's role in a culture where electronic, networked media is dominant. No amount of professionalization will protect literary scholars from that decline. It may even be that the constraints of the profession itself block scholars from engaging with it.

This can all sound like a disciplinary star collapsing in on itself. Is there any light that can still escape? *Professing Criticism* has suggestions for how literary studies can more sharply define its purpose. In a final hortatory chapter, Guillory argues that scholars should rethink their subject as a history of the medium of writing, reconnecting their field to the ancient arts of rhetoric while seeking to understand the role of writing in an evolving media system that threatens to swallow "literature." But his most intriguing and unsettling observations hew closer to a sociological account of the material conditions of literary studies now—in particular, the terrain of graduate education in the 2020s.

Literary criticism's happy sanctuary in higher education coexisted with a much longer tradition of critical writing within a journalistic public sphere; it simply widened the gap between the freelance critic and the bureaucratized critic within the academy. Only a vanishingly select few could keep their feet in both places, usually at some damage to their reputation from either side. Today that gap has closed. Guillory's usually clinical tone modulates into something more like wonder when he describes how the metastasizing post-2008 casualization of the literary professoriate has created what he calls a "semiautonomous professional sphere," a cultural space half-tethered to the university but ideologically distinct from it. Put more simply: Guillory's term is an attempt to describe the world of the

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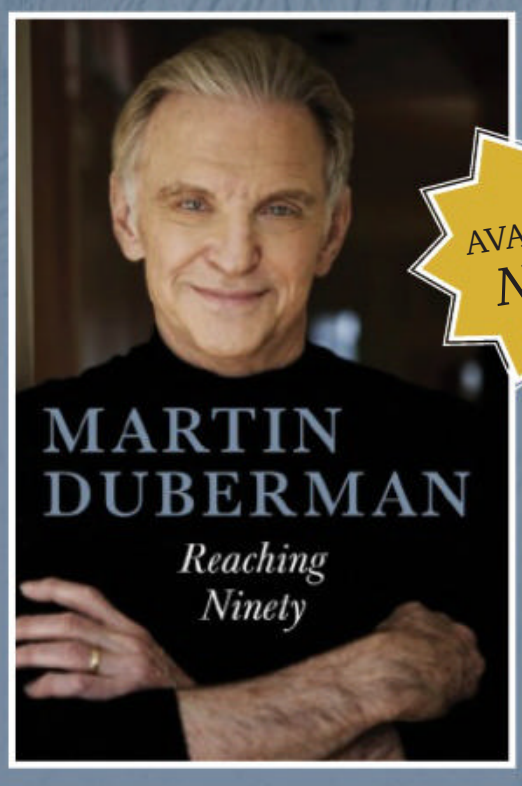

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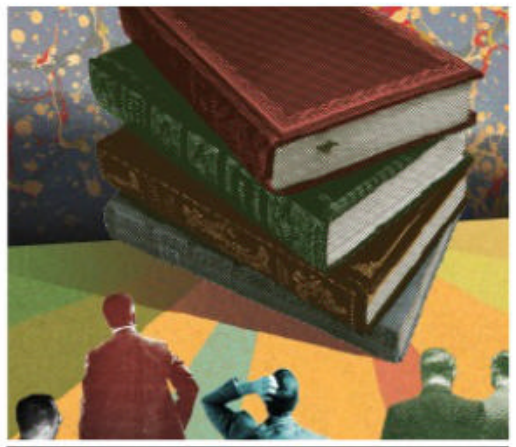
graduate student, postdoc, or adjunct—a world whose members actually outnumber, and may intellectually outweigh, the still-professional space of the tenured faculty who teach them.

Graduate students are perhaps the prime example of this semi-professional space. Forced to mimic "professional" activities in anticipation of the job market's hyperinflated demands, they have to overproduce writing whose audience, crucially, will primarily be other graduate students. The seminar, as the site of professional reproduction, now dwindles in importance. What replaces it are "new associational forms" that are lateral rather than hierarchical: workshops, reading groups, student-led conferences, blogs and online reviews, union organizing, and even more ephemeral conversations on social media that adopt and discard theoretical approaches, shape new tastes, and in general articulate a critical will not welded to professional norms. Individual departmental cohorts and their once-specific cultures dissolve into a semi-public culture, "a national and even international corps."

That culture's inside/outside presence in relation to the university—existing as a sufferance of it rather than a preparation for permanent inclusion within it—explains both its sophistication and its independence: an intellectually fertile combination paid for, in a compromise no one sought, by the erasure of professionalism's long-term economic guarantees. It's a new and wrenching geometry: a temporary job and a public voice—but not really a career, the thing supposed to make it all viable, and thus not a true profession either. The university becomes a transient place where solidarities, not apprenticeships, occur; "criticism" names something that happens elsewhere. It is scarcely tenable, but it is increasingly criticism's setting.

This is where Guillory is at his most provocative, signaled by the hesitant tone he adopts when discussing it. But there may be no reason for reluctance. If this is the light of the discipline's dying star, the event has already happened—even perhaps as far back as the early culture-war phase of the 1990s, whose obsessive hold over literary studies was Guillory's subject in his first book. But in retrospect, we might see the profession's actual energy as having exploded elsewhere. By the time *Cultural Capital* was published, a phase of labor actions and organizing drives had just started to spread from public to private universities, forming new collectivities through the sharing of organizational and legal tactics. The ensuing struggles—at Yale, the University of California system, New York University, Columbia, and countless others—were generationally defining.



Guillory is ideally suited to serve as a guide to the polycrisis literary studies faces.

Meanwhile, just as unionization was picking up momentum, the Internet began to change the way that academics communicated and published. Guillory's analysis allows us to see the mutually reinforcing tendencies of these two developments. By lowering the barrier to entry, the Internet encouraged an early 21st-century efflorescence of occasional criticism and spontaneous theorizing that fostered vibrant subcultural readerships. One result was the return of the little magazine—some new, some revived, but all of them providing a venue for a more directly politicized form of criticism, a politics increasingly inspired by the direct action of labor organizing. *Cultural Capital* may have been a final witness to one kind of literary criticism, stable as it once was; *Professing Criticism* is a witness to what is replacing it.

These changes, however dissimilar in scale and speed, intersected to create the conditions for what Guillory analyzes as thoroughly horizontal modes of association, cutting across institutional boundaries and professional norms. The new semi-public sphere silently replacing the "profession" is poised outward—to an online readership acquainted with literary theory but with no professional investment in it—and laterally, to the collectivity of labor movements and class identifications, not professional membership. The magazine, the blog, the union: These different but adjacent and interconnected phenomena have loosened the bonds of what was once called a profession by replacing its modes of association. Guillory's "semi-autonomous professional sphere" is a way of describing this epochal change, hesitantly perhaps because it may still seem like a transitional phenomenon leading somewhere unknown. If it isn't at the center of *Professing Criticism*, its place in the book tells us that the history of "criticism" can no longer be written without it.

Of course, these shifts are relevant to a more general story of higher education and also intellectual life in the United States. But they have a particular importance for literary studies, given its uncertain place among the disciplines, and they suggest urgent questions that the next history of literary criticism will have to take up. Among them: What purpose does graduate education serve now? Students come to graduate school shaped by critical genres that are in any case not primarily academic ones; they are already reviewers, online essayists, cultural commentators. Harking back to the alt-weekly, the zine, and the little magazine, and taking place now in too many venues and subcultures to easily encompass, the fact that aspirant critics will likely have deep experience in extramural genres before starting their graduate education turns "professional training" into something hard to describe and possibly vestigial.

Similarly, what does a criticism written in this new hybrid space look like? Is it more or less "literary," more or less committed to the distinctiveness of literature, when "literature" no longer primarily names a professional formation? Freed from the question of the syllabus, can it imagine the politics of literature more capaciously? How does it connect the bookishness of literature to newer media, particularly the media the critic writes in? We may know better in a few years' time. But there may also be no reason to wait. Almost despite itself, *Professing Criticism* suggests that the change has already happened, and all we have to do is look around us. N

Letters

Toadying at Harvard

Re "Why the Kennedy School Rejected Ken Roth," by Michael Massing [Jan. 23/30]: Hats off to Harvard's Kennedy School of Government for enlightening us on how university decisions are influenced by wealthy donors, how various American Jewish establishment organizations use the false charge of anti-Semitism to suppress criticism of Israel, and how vulnerable our democratic institutions are to elite capture. To contain damage to its faltering credibility, Kennedy dean Douglas Elmendorf reversed his decision to block a fellowship offer to Kenneth Roth, the former executive director of Human Rights Watch, which had issued a report documenting Israeli apartheid. While Roth believes that Harvard withdrew his appointment to intimidate others who might be tempted to criticize Israel's apartheid policies, Massing's article also reveals the disturbingly close relationship between the university and the CIA, suggesting an additional reason for Harvard's rejection—namely, Israel's strategic role in protecting the US empire. Secretary of State Alexander Haig's observation 30 years ago still resonates today: "Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk."

Before Harvard's face-saving concession, there was growing support among the university's students, faculty, and alumni for Elmendorf to resign. But reversing his decision is not likely to protect the next truth-teller at an academic institution with a far smaller endowment or in the corporate news media, the arts, or other places of employment. Our challenge now is to use this example of Roth's ordeal to make three crucial demands: (1) Full disclosure of the donors Elmendorf consulted with before rescinding Roth's fellowship. (2) Development of legislation that requires all donors to US academic institutions to disclose their identities and revokes the tax-exempt status of any institution that bows to donor pressure to censor academic inquiry. (3) Rejection of the misleadingly labeled International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of "anti-Semitism" at all levels of government, which has been used to stifle criticism of Israel's oppression of Palestinians.

Bob Griss
POTOMAC, MD.

The writer is a coordinator of a Nation *discussion group in Washington, D.C.*

The decision by Elmendorf to deny Roth a fellow's appointment reflects the toadying to Washington and to major donors that's been going on at the Kennedy School for decades. The school's administrators have been equally shameless on the matter of human rights. In 1991, when the former Guatemalan defense minister Héctor Gramajo completed one of the school's programs, he was handed papers during the graduation ceremony charging him with the deaths of thousands of Mayans. He left the country with his diploma.

Derek Leebaert
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The writer is a former research fellow of what is now the Belfer Center at the Kennedy School.

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Q&A

Naomi Oreskes

The publication of Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues From Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change* in 2010 helped transform how science news was reported in the media. The book persuaded reporters worldwide to become more skeptical of industry-sponsored "experts"—particularly on issues like global warming. Oreskes and Conway hope their latest collaboration, *The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market* (Bloomsbury), will have a similar impact. I recently caught up with Oreskes, who teaches science history at Harvard, to discuss *The Big Myth* and how free market economics became a dominant force in American public policy. —*Claudia Dreifus*

CD: How did the idea behind *The Big Myth* come to you?

NO: After the success of *Merchants of Doubt*, Erik and I started thinking about doing another book together. At first, we thought we'd write about the technological solutions to climate change. But every time we started, what kept coming up was that a lack of the right technologies wasn't the problem—most of the technologies we need already exist. But to get them in place, you need the right policies. That's mostly a political question. That threw us back to something we'd been thinking about since we began researching *Merchants of Doubt*. In that book, the big question was "Why would intelligent people deny science?" In particular, why would famous scientists attack science to create doubt about the dangers of smoking, the thinning of the ozone layer, and climate change?

CD: And what did you conclude?

NO: That the scientists we called "the merchants of doubt" had an ideological framework of free market economics—what George Soros has called "market fundamentalism." They believed that if the government became involved in economic questions, it would be the slippery slope to socialism. They thought that if the government told you not to smoke cigarettes, it would next tell you what job you could have, where you could live, and whether you could eat hamburgers. It wasn't just the merchants of doubt who thought this way. The business media tends to take a consistently pro-market, anti-government, anti-regulatory stance. When we wrote *The Merchants of Doubt*, we noticed how much climate denial appeared in the financial press—even though climate change is objectively and immediately damaging to many businesses. The more we examined it, the more we recognized that we should focus on this.

Our basic question: Where did market fundamentalism come from? And how did it get such a strong foothold in America?

CD: American public opinion was not always anti-government, was it?

NO: The relationship of the American people to our federal government is complicated. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were huge debates about whether the government had the right to ban child labor or protect workers in factories. Many people thought yes, but many business groups argued no. However, the Great Depression led to a broad agreement that the government has a role to play, not just in protecting workers and consumers but also in protecting capitalism itself. Still, during the New Deal, many business leaders fought bitterly against federal involvement in the economy. They lost that debate. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, they reorganized and built a new network to try to undo the New Deal. We've documented how a network of conservative ideologues and business leaders built the market fundamentalist case and took it into the mainstream.

CD: *The Big Myth* is likely to encounter a lot of resistance.

NO: I expect that. This idea that we should put all our faith in markets—it's been the dominant ideology of American life for the last 50 years or more. And not just among Republicans. I had a moment of truth at an event at Harvard. I was on a panel on climate change with very prominent people, including several who'd served in the Obama administration. Every one of them—except for me—was talking about "markets" this, "markets" that. Afterwards a student said to me, "Oh my God... 'markets, markets, markets!'" N

KAYANA SZYMCZAK

"The relationship of the American people to our government is complicated."

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